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Women in Residence:
Forms of Belonging in Jane Austen

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared as “Women Owning Property: The Great Lady in Jane Austen” in Mimi Marinucci’s collection *Jane Austen and Philosophy*, published by Rowman and Littlefield in 2016, and an earlier version of chapter 2 appeared as “‘An Office in Which She Had Always Depended’: Surrogate Managers in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*” in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* in 2018.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the centrality of non-portable property – the house – in Austen’s fictional landscapes, in particular her portrayal of the ways in which her female characters establish feelings of ownership and belonging towards houses they are not legally entitled to own. Austen’s novels therefore offer ways of thinking about property that would not be legitimised by the law for several decades after her death. As I demonstrate, through her novels Austen offers more than just a critique of the current property laws and the ways in which they leave women in a precarious situation: she shows how women can circumvent the limitations of the law, in order to develop a sense of purpose for themselves and express their identities through the spaces they create and occupy. In doing so, she legitimises female ownership of property in a way that is distinctly emancipatory.

This work is interdisciplinary in nature, in the sense that it draws on the dialogue on women and property, management, education and accomplishments as present in such non-fictional sources as conduct books, diary entries and letters, as well as fictional works of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It at once engages with and challenges social history by exploring the ways in which fiction can represent experiences of ownership that a sole focus on legal discourse would overlook. Through my analysis of Austen’s representations of the various relationships women can form with the spaces they inhabit, I encourage a revision of the common conception we currently hold of ownership as something that is dependent on a legal right. This conception, as I argue, is unhelpful in understanding Austen’s depiction of women’s relationships with property, as well as the ways in which people more generally conceptualise such relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has read *Sense and Sensibility* will remember Jane Austen's description of how Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret, are forced to leave their home at Norland Park and find a new place of residence. My first encounters with this episode left me with feelings of pity for these women due to all they had lost and would never regain. Although the novel opens with the information that "The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex," with the estate of Norland being "in the centre of their property" (3), the branch of the family on which the novel focuses first arrive at the estate as visitors.¹ The Dashwood family thus makes Norland Park their home for an unspecified number of years. Mr. Dashwood, however, holds ownership of the property for one year only following the death of his uncle, after which it passes to his son, the three sisters being left with a mere one thousand pounds a year each in the will. "[Degraded] to the condition of visitors" (6) in their own house, the Dashwood women are made to find a new place of residence, one that is more suited to their reduced circumstances. In the sixth chapter of the novel, Austen places considerable emphasis on the feelings of displacement these women experience when a few months after Mr. Dashwood's death they leave Norland Park forever: "Many were the tears shed by them in their last adieus to a place so much beloved" (21). Upon arriving at their new house, Austen writes again that they shed tears as they compare the cottage to the home they have left behind (22).

And yet, in the course of writing this thesis I have realised that the arrival at the cottage was not the straightforwardly disheartening and pitiful moment that I had believed it to be, but that there was scope for reading it as something other than an unadulterated representation of loss and displacement. Indeed, the Dashwood women's initial feelings upon seeing the cottage may be described as disappointment, but these are rapidly succeeded by an expression of resistance to their dispossession: "In comparison to Norland, it was poor and small indeed! – but the tears which recollection called forth as they entered the house were soon dried away" (22). The

¹ See Margaret Doody's introduction to *Sense and Sensibility*, in which she analyses the opening paragraph of the novel: "But, of course, the Dashwood 'family' that we come to know is unorthodox, differentiated and outcast. This Dashwood family, the one that holds centre stage in the novel, is a group of women: a mother and three daughters. They have thus no claim to the real property, the real estate of Norland" (viii).

subsequent impressions that the Dashwood women receive of the cottage are all favourable: the weather is good, so the cottage is seen at its best, the view from its windows is “pleasant” (22) and they are welcomed into the neighbourhood by their landlord, who brings them presents of game and fruit (24). Austen then describes their occupation and decoration of the space of the cottage by writing that “each of them was busy arranging their particular concerns, and endeavouring, by placing around them their books and their possessions, to form themselves a home” (23). This sentence, easily missed, is essential to our understanding of Austen’s portrayal of the complexity of women’s relationships to property. Here, Austen describes a personalised organisation of portable property within the space of the cottage, which she presents as an expression of identity and a way of claiming ownership over that space. Austen thus shows ownership over a space to be something that is independent of the law, since she attributes it to characters of unpropertied women, with no legal claim over the house in which they live. Austen’s real achievement in this chapter and in the novel in general is not to portray vividly the feelings of displacement a woman might feel when forced to leave her home – although she certainly accomplishes this – but to depict her female characters overcoming this displacement. Austen’s portrayal of women establishing their claim to a property in this way is an original and emancipatory aspect of her work that is yet to be fully recognised in its criticism.

This thesis investigates the centrality of non-portable property – the house – in Austen’s fictional landscapes and the ways in which it allows Austen to depict her characters establishing complex relationships to the spaces they inhabit. In particular, it considers how her female characters establish feelings of ownership and belonging towards houses they are not legally entitled to own. Samuel Johnson defines “to belong” as “to be the property of,” “to be the province or business of,” “to adhere, or be appending to,” “to have relation to,” “to be the quality or attributes of” or “to be referred to.” Austen’s exploration of the concept of belonging encompasses some of these meanings, as well as others: to be a member of a certain family, or a certain circle, to hold a particular role, to be compatible with someone and to fit a certain environment. In the portrayal of her female characters, Austen shows them actively circumventing the limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal society in which they live. Austen’s novels consequently offer ways of thinking about property that would not be legitimised by the law for several decades after her death. Such a representation of women’s relationships to property is distinctly emancipatory, as it

liberates her characters from constraints with which the law threatens to oppress them. By eluding the unfair legal restrictions the current property system imposes on them, these female characters are empowered to create a sense of ownership and belonging over the spaces they inhabit. Through her work, Austen therefore offers more than just a criticism of the current property laws and the ways in which they leave women in a precarious situation: she puts forward an alternative way for women to create a sense of purpose for themselves and express their identities through the spaces they create and occupy.

The expression “to form themselves a home” (23) in the description of the Dashwood women’s occupation of Barton cottage denotes another interest of Austen’s: the emotional aspect of one’s relationship to space. Through the focus on the role of houses in Austen’s novels, this thesis investigates her representation of such affective relationships between her female characters and the spaces they inhabit. According to Karen Harvey, by the eighteenth century the world “home” represented the merging of domestic space and family members into a single commanding concept, with domesticity also acquiring “psychological and emotional dimensions” (9).² Furthermore, Francesca Saggini and Anna Soccio explain how the domestic space came to be associated with the mistress of the house: “With the development of a proto-capitalist society, ‘home’ became even more associated with the idea of an environment for women, especially for middle-class background, upon which female refinement and taste on the one hand and female virtue and modesty on the other could put their stamp” (3).³ Even though these two critics affirm that “in the proto-capitalist universe of the late Georgian reign, the house as a wish-fulfilling signal of status and belonging could also be imag(in)ed as the space of self-fashioning, market mobility and social possibilities” (4), they do not seem to regard it as being applicable to women. Indeed, Saggini and Soccio consider the association between the home and its female occupant to have “all too predictable stifling consequences for women” (3). And yet, in the description of the Dashwood women’s occupation of the cottage Austen

² Francesca Saggini and Anna Soccio have similarly argued that “the term ‘home’ related more to privacy, intimacy and retreat, symbolises its inhabitants and their values, whereas ‘house’ refers primarily to the building customarily used for habitation” (2).

³ Mirella Billi also states that the term “home” “refers more precisely to the space of the family and private life, to the dynamics of personal relationships, to the forms of education and manners mainly associated with women” (61).

reveals an interest in this conceptualisation of a sense of belonging through one's relationship to property, and presents it as being very much within women's reach.

Due to my focus on non-portable property, whenever I use the term "property" throughout this thesis I refer to real property, particularly freehold land and the house that was built on that land. At the time in which Austen was writing, property was divided into two principal types: real and personal. Personal property encompassed all moveable goods such as money, clothing and household furniture. Though personal property is mentioned in some instances in this thesis – particularly in chapter 3 – I specify if I am referring to personal property, and use the term "property" throughout exclusively in relation to real property. The term "land" comprised three categories: freehold, copyhold and leasehold. Freehold land would have originally been held by the upper classes in exchange for military and political obligations (Holcombe 20), and only freehold would have been considered real property (Erickson 23). All of the houses from Austen's novels I consider are part of freehold land. The only exceptions to this are Barton cottage, which is held as freehold by Sir John but as a lease by the Dashwood women, as they are only renting it, and the house that Sir Walter and his two daughters inhabit in *Persuasion*, which is also a lease.

Under English common law, only single women and widows could own real property (Laurence, *Women in England* 228). If a woman married, she would technically continue to hold legal ownership over any property she had inherited, but control over it would be transferred to her husband and she would not be allowed to dispose of it without his consent (Newton et al. 88). Under coverture, a system which treated the couple as a single economic unit, the husband was also entitled to all personal assets – from investments and money to clothes and jewellery – that came into his wife's possession before or after the wedding had taken place (Newton et al. 88). Compared to some European countries, property laws in England were more injurious to wives, an aspect highlighted by the anonymous author of the 1735 *The Hardships of English Laws in Relation to Wives*:

I have been informed by Persons of great Integrity, who have long resided in Portugal and consequently had opportunities of knowing the Customs of the Country, that a Wife in Portugal if she brought never a Farthing, has Power to dispose of half her Husband's Estate by Will; whereas a Woman by our Law alienates all her own Property so entirely by Marriage, that if she brought an

hundred thousand Pounds in Money, she cannot bequeath one single Penny, even if she left her own nearest and dearest Relations starving for Want. (29-30)

As Amy Erickson affirms, “Much of continental Europe had partible inheritance, and both visitors to England and some Englishmen expressed concern that primogeniture was applied more harshly in England than elsewhere” (71). The law would not change until the Married Woman’s Property Act of 1870, which finally allowed a married woman to keep control over her property after marriage.⁴ The system of primogeniture, by benefitting older brothers, also placed both younger brothers and women in a disadvantaged position. Because younger brothers had more opportunities for making their concerns heard, complaints about the unfairness of the system of primogeniture usually focused on the ways in which it disadvantaged younger brothers rather than their sisters.⁵

There were, however, some ways to circumvent the restrictive dictates of common law. In her work on women and property in the early modern period, Erickson poses a question that is also applicable to eighteenth-century women: “How did early modern women survive when not only were their wages significantly lower than men’s, but the common law only allowed them to inherit land if they had no brothers, under a system of primogeniture?” (3). Erickson explains that “despite its equalitarian name the common law was the creation of the medieval landed classes to preserve dynastic hegemony through practices like primogeniture and coverture” (29), but there were other bodies of the law that regulated property ownership (Erickson 5). These were in place from the middle ages until the nineteenth century. Equity courts were particularly important, as they “originated in order to modify what was perceived as the harshness of common law” (5) and they recognised the property of married women. There were also the ecclesiastical courts, which dealt with the division of personal property and marriage settlements. According to Briony McDonagh, these

⁴ See Deborah Wynne, 24. Until this first Act, a married woman could not maintain control over her own property, unless it had been protected with a trust prior to her marriage. Unfortunately, loopholes in this Act meant that some wives were not able to prevent their husbands from confiscating their property, which led to the creation of a second Act. This one, from 1882, is the most widely known of the three property Acts. In 1893 the final one was passed, which made wives completely liable for their debts.

⁵ For more on men’s objections to the system of primogeniture, see Erickson 71.

courts allowed women “to defend cases independently of their husbands, hence many married women turned to them as a forum for litigation” (21). Marriage settlements could be used “to determine succession via so-called strict settlements, to establish jointure, to specify the pin money a wife was to receive and to reserve the right for her to make a will,” but more importantly it allowed her to set aside any land that she inherited, which would remain under her control (McDonagh 22). In order to take advantage of the opportunities marriage settlements offered, however, a woman needed to have a certain knowledge of the law. This posed a problem, since in many cases the education women received would not have provided them with such knowledge, something the author of *The Hardships of English Laws* also laments: “But if we reflect how extreamly [sic] ignorant all young Women are as to points in Law, and how their Education and Way of Life, shuts them out from the Knowledge of their true Interest in almost all things, we shall find that their Trust and confidence in the Man they love and Inability to make use of the proper Means to guard against his falsehood, leave few in a Condition to make use of that precaution” (33). Although under a strict settlement a woman would still be dependent on trustees “who technically owned the property and might impose conditions” (McDonagh 22), marriage settlements were still a powerful resource that allowed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women to keep their property outside of the control of their future husbands. McDonagh states that marriage settlements would have been resorted to either to protect property which had been inherited by a woman as an heiress or by a widow who remarried and wished to keep her second husband from gaining control over the property she had inherited from the first (21). In *Sanditon*, Austen indicates that the widow Lady Denham made a marriage settlement previous to her second marriage precisely for this reason. The second husband, Sir Harry Denham, marries her for mercenary motives, but due to the marriage settlement the property remains under Lady Denham’s control: “She had been too wary to put anything out of her own Power” (304). Lady Denham’s knowledge of property law thus prevents her second husband’s wish of “permanently enriching his family” (304) from ever materialising. According to Erickson, although marriage settlements have been described as “deviations from custom,” in some parts of the population “the deviation was so common as to have become custom itself” (100).

Even in cases in which women inherited property, some critics have still considered that women would not have been allowed the same liberty as men in its

management. Gillian Skinner has argued that although some women did inherit their own property, “it was assumed that their interest in it would be purely as a means of support” (103). Equally, Sandie Byrne states that women would “remain in relation to their property in a way quite different from that of a male owner” (239). However, recently some critics and historians have contradicted the notion that women would not have played an active role in the management of property or that their relationship to it would have been necessarily precarious. McDonagh, whose work focuses on elite eighteenth-century women and the architectural landscape, affirms that “Demographic circumstance coupled with the inevitable gap between legal theory and everyday practice meant that more women owned property than might be expected given the strictures of primogeniture and coverture” (17). Because a considerable number of families failed to produce male heirs, women could inherit as heiresses or, alternatively, since wives often outlived their husbands, inherit as widows (McDonagh 17). Furthermore, the existence of marriage settlements “meant that many married women could and did think of themselves as the owners of landed estates, both large and small” (17). In *Behind Closed Doors*, Amanda Vickery explores various types of relationships that women established towards houses, and demonstrates the active role that they played in its decoration, management and general improvement. Judith S. Lewis has written on the active role that many eighteenth-century women played in politics, despite their lack of opportunities for the ownership of property. Dana Arnold has argued that it was common for a woman to run the estate while her husband was away (85), and Anne Laurence has suggested that if a husband died intestate a woman would almost always have been appointed as the administrator of the estate (235). Furthermore, Vickery and Lewis, together with McDonagh, have presented data in their studies demonstrating that ownership of landed property amongst women would have been substantial, something which will be considered in greater detail in the first chapter of this thesis. In her study, McDonagh also provides examples of women who, despite lacking legal ownership over the house in which they lived, still considered themselves landowners (54).

I agree with Erickson who, in her study on ordinary early modern women and property, writes that “Property offers an excellent means of comparing the theoretical ideal, in the form of the law, with actual practice, in terms of ordinary women’s ownership” (4). Even though married women’s relationships to property would most certainly be determined by any property arrangements before the marriage, “her

husband's good will" was also a factor (101). The experiences of two women in the exact same legal situation, therefore, could be incredibly dissimilar. And yet, "actual examples of cooperation will inevitably be rare in the extreme, since documentation is traditionally produced by conflict, not by peace and harmony" (149). While studies such as Vickery's and McDonagh's partially disprove this by presenting sources such as letters and diary entries which document various harmonious relationships to property by women who lacked any legal ownership over it, this lack of documentation would explain why historians such as Lee Holcombe would have considered that the law, before the publication of the Married Women's Property Acts, "regarding a woman as her husband's servant, even his chattel, destroyed her independence, her identity, and her self-respect" (3). As Erickson affirms, "It is relatively easy to compile information on how women as a sex were supposed to act in early modern England, and lists of the legal restrictions placed upon them. It is much more difficult to ascertain exactly how women did behave and how they responded to their legal disabilities" (223). The ways in which Austen's novels function as fictional representations of this complexity that characterises the reality of women's relationships to property is one of the main goals of this work. Austen's depiction of female characters thinking about property in ways that would not be legitimised by the law until much later in the nineteenth century thus serves as a way of illustrating the difference between the strict dictates of the law and the heterogeneity of lived experience.

Indeed, in this thesis I seek to demonstrate the emancipatory character of Austen's decision, through her writing, to place women at the centre of a dialogue about relationships to property. While much could be written on men and property in Austen's novels, the fact that all of her novels are centred around female characters, with much attention being devoted by Austen to the spaces they inhabit, is revealing of a particular interest in how women create complex and varied relationships towards such spaces. Austen thus represents gendered relationships towards property and demonstrates how women are able to conceptualise an identity and sense of belonging for themselves in relation to the spaces in which they live, despite the law placing them in a comparatively precarious situation. For Austen, affection is a legitimate basis for ownership, which means that it is perfectly possible for someone to regard their occupation of a house as a matter of ownership without holding legal ownership over it. To make this claim is not to deny that the law placed women in a disadvantaged position, or to argue that legal ownership of property is ultimately of trivial importance,

but to assert that the common conception we currently have of ownership is inadequate.

With very high percentages of the land in the period in which Austen was writing being owned by such a small percentage of the population, it naturally follows that it was not only women who had to accept that they would never own the house in which they lived.⁶ Even in 2016, the percentage of English people who were the legal owners of the houses in which they lived was no higher than 64%.⁷ The current generation of young people in the UK has also been termed “Generation Rent” due to their lack of opportunities and inclination for becoming house owners, with a recent report predictably indicating that up to a third of these people will rent for the entirety of their lives.⁸ For people in such situations, the status quo is one that invariably does not include legal ownership over the spaces in which they live. To consider that the development of feelings of ownership over the space one inhabits is only possible when such feelings are legally validated is therefore to ignore the experiences of a high percentage of the population at any point in history. Throughout the course of this thesis, I demonstrate that Austen was fully aware of this and particularly concerned about bringing women’s experiences of affective relationships to space to light.

This work is interdisciplinary in nature, in the sense that it draws on the dialogue on women and property, management, education and accomplishments as present in such non-fictional sources as conduct books, diary entries and letters, as well as fictional works of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It at once engages with and challenges social history by exploring the ways in which fiction can represent experiences of ownership that a sole focus on legal discourse would overlook. Through my analysis of Austen’s representations of the various relationships women can form

⁶ As Janette Rutterford and Josephine Maltby affirm, “A survey of estates carried out in 1875 revealed that one quarter of all land in England was held by only 710 individuals,” a result of both the entail of estates and the system of primogeniture (153).

⁷ See Hilary Osborne, “Home Ownership in England at Lowest Level in 30 Years as Housing Crisis Grows,” *The Guardian*, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/aug/02/home-ownership-in-england-at-lowest-level-in-30-years-as-housing-crisis-grows>. See also the English Housing Survey report: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658478/2015-16_EHS_Headline_Report.pdf. Unfortunately, the report separates the population in age groups, with gender not being one of the categories, so it is not possible to know the percentage of women who legally own their own houses and how it compares with the numbers for men.

⁸ See Kamal Ahmed, “Up to a third of millennials ‘face renting their entire life,’” BBC News, 2018, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43788537>.

with the spaces they inhabit, I encourage a revision of the common conception we currently hold of ownership as something that is dependent on a legal right. This conception, as I argue, is unhelpful in understanding Austen's depiction of women's relationships with property, as well as the ways in which people more generally conceptualise such relationships.

Some Austen critics, such as D. A. Miller, have offered a tight focus on matters of form and style.⁹ I place my work, however, alongside that of Marilyn Butler, Claudia Johnson and William Galperin, to name a few, whose research is historically oriented. Butler's highly influential 1975 *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* argued that during the period in which Austen was writing literature was partisan, and that Austen's novels belong distinctively to one type of partisan novels, the conservative (3). According to Butler, Austen's novels could thus be divided between those which feature "the Heroine who is Right," a representative of conservative ideology, and "The Heroines who are Wrong," who by the end of the novels realise the error of their ways (166). By analysing what she considers to be similarities between Austen's novels and those of didactic authors such as Hannah More and Jane West, Butler concludes that Austen's work reveals her to be "a committed conservative" (165).

Johnson's *Jane Austen, Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988) famously argued against Butler's view of Austen as a conservative by highlighting the lack of any statements by Austen or about her that characterise her as such (xviii). According to Johnson, despite Austen and her family belonging to a certain social class, the gentry, it would be incorrect to conclude that she automatically agreed with all of its values (xviii). Johnson presents a different historical approach to Austen's work, one that explores both how it unfolded from a tradition of political novels that was predominantly feminine, and how it departed from it (xix). Although Johnson agrees that these novels would have been political in nature, she disagrees with Butler by describing them as flexible rather than distinctly partisan (xix). According to Johnson, far from siding with conservative authors, Austen used her novels to question their methods. Like Johnson, I consider that Austen intended her novels to be characterised by a general tone of broad-mindedness rather than rigid one-sidedness, and to express the idea that the line between good and bad, right and wrong is not easily drawn. In doing so, Austen represents human experience as something that is inevitably complex, messy and

⁹ D. A. Miller. *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

heterogeneous. Other critics writing after Johnson also highlight the feminist and emancipatory aspects of Austen's work. Margaret Kirkham, who analyses Austen's work alongside that of feminist authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, argued that Austen was a feminist author who believed in women's ability to reason. Nora Nachumi, writing about *Mansfield Park*, agrees with this and states that Austen encourages her readers to have both a rational and an emotional response to her novels (238). This is something that I also argue throughout this thesis.

More recently, in *The Historical Austen* (2003), William Galperin offers his own revision of the socio-historical approach to Austen by arguing in favour of a reading that considers a novel's historical agency instead of just its ability to reflect a particular historical context. As Galperin argues, Austen's novels are not just a reflection of the context in which she was writing but "a context in themselves" (1). In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1989) Nancy Armstrong also attributes historical agency to novels by arguing that the domestic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a model of identity that led to the English middle classes achieving cultural hegemony. As Armstrong affirms, fiction can be seen "both as the document and as the agency of cultural history" (23). Like these two critics, I too argue that in her novels Austen goes beyond denouncing the defects of the customs of her time. While Austen does expose the injustice of property law and the ways in which it disadvantages women, her greater achievement is to question the very notion of ownership as something that is dependent on the law, and to represent various possibilities for the ownership of space, specifically ways for her female characters to establish feelings of ownership and possession towards properties that they are not legally entitled to own. Austen does not present her readers with clear moral lessons and didactic conclusions; rather she invites them to consider the complexity and heterogeneity of women's relationships towards property.

The term "feelings of ownership," which I use throughout this thesis, was employed by Wynne in her 2010 study on women and personal property in the Victorian novel. Wynne explores the ways in which Victorian novels represent relationships towards portable property that were not legitimised by the law. According to Wynne, "Victorian women could sometimes ignore the legal strictures of coverture, even remain unaware of them, creating for themselves feelings of ownership which, while not supported by the law, were rarely challenged" (9). While I problematise the concept of "ownership," Wynne asks for a reconsideration of that

of “property,” and describes it as something that is not just part of the material world, but is also “a relationship, a site of affect, sentiment, dreams and passions” (16). By property, however, Wynne means exclusively portable property. Her study elucidates how the possession of objects could provide a woman with a sense of ownership that her otherwise dispossessed state seemed to deny her. Victorian novels such as those Wynne analyses thus feature female characters who, through the establishment of relationships with non-portable property, are able to overlook their lack of ownership over the spaces they inhabit. Wynne explains her focus on portable property by arguing that, due to the restrictions imposed by property law, women would not have been able to create feelings of ownership for real property, instead settling for forming them towards portable items: “While women’s feelings of ownership may have been illusory from a legal perspective, the chances were that most women *felt* and *believed* that they owned their personal portable items. Denied full access to the ownership of real property, women made do with securing their identity on such personal, portable things” (35, emphasis in the original). And yet, as Wynne herself states, women in the Victorian period and in Austen’s would also not have been the legal owners of the portable property they considered to be their own. It is, consequently, possible that these feelings of ownership formed independently from the law applied to other kinds of property. Despite the fact that objects certainly feature in interesting ways in Austen’s novels, she never presents ownership over them as a suitable consolation for the lack of ownership over one’s home. While portable property could, as Wynne demonstrates, provide a woman with a sense of ownership, Austen understood that it simply could not replace the level of security, as well as the potential for the conceptualisation of one’s identity and a sense of purpose for oneself that belongs to non-portable property. With this in mind, Austen creates female characters who, through their ingenuity, circumvent the limitations of the law and create a sense of belonging to the houses they inhabit. As a result, no other type of property rivals the importance of non-portable property in Austen’s novels.

Biographical evidence demonstrates that houses played an important role in Austen’s life. Much like her heroines, she confronted the fear of having no place to live, and after her father’s death she, her mother and her sister were wholly dependent on the generosity of her brothers for a comfortable place to live. In her letters, she describes her feelings upon leaving the house in which she was born, the moments of arrival at the subsequent houses, including the very last one in Chawton, and the

decorations undertaken in order to adapt these spaces to the taste of their new occupants. Her letters also reveal her to have read various conduct books directed at women, which directly engaged with the dialogue on accomplishments and how these could allow women to express their identity by decorating the spaces they inhabited. Both non-fictional texts such as conduct books and fictional texts written in Austen's period presupposed that a woman would possess the ingenuity and the wish to personalise domestic spaces through her own manual work and according to her taste. While the acquisition and practice of accomplishments by women was regarded with some suspicion due to what was seen by many as their superficial quality, their enabling potential was also acknowledged. Indeed, many texts in this period present women's decorative abilities as a way of improving their connection to the domestic space. At the same time, these abilities are depicted as a way of facilitating sociability, therefore establishing a connection between the private space of the home and the public space of the neighbourhood. Austen was clearly influenced by such ideas, since in her novels she presents the decoration of the space of a new house as a way for single unpropertied women to form a sense of attachment to this space. Furthermore, she depicts these characters demonstrating their taste and ingenuity through the creation of craft items that are so intimately connected to their creator that they become inalienable. The subsequent offer of this craft item to someone else and the relationship that is maintained through it is presented by Austen as allowing a woman to extend her sense of rootedness – by which I mean a sense of being firmly established and settled, as well as unchanging and undeviating – beyond the space of the house. Austen thus portrays dedication to domestic work and to the domestic space as a means for dispossessed women to resist the inequality that is imposed on them by the law.

A genteel single woman's lack of a legal right over the house she inhabits and of an independent income, and the ways in which these disadvantages make for gendered relationships towards spaces, is a recurrent theme throughout Austen's novels. The instability that characterises the life of a woman in such a situation, however, and which Austen attributes to all her heroines with the exception of Emma, does not prevent these characters from establishing feelings of ownership towards the space of the house of a prospective husband and of imagining a future in it. Austen's portrayal of her female characters establishing a relationship towards property that encompasses the idea of longing is therefore characterised by an interesting combination of temporalities. By imagining a future for herself in the house of the prospective husband

whilst occupying that space in the present, the female character is able to experience feelings of ownership and belonging towards the space. The fact that such a character does not currently live in the space she is occupying is irrelevant: she is able to develop those feelings by *imaginatively* inhabiting a potential future in which she will be married to the owner of the house. Through this combination of temporalities, Austen continues to complicate and expand the notion of ownership in a way that gives agency to her female characters.

While property, both portable and non-portable, and its role in the novels is a topic that has been generally neglected in Austen criticism, some recent pieces of work on it do exist. Sandie Byrne's *Jane Austen: Possessions and Disposessions* analyses the role of objects in Austen's novels, while Barbara Hardy's *A Reading of Jane Austen* features a chapter on the same topic. *A Companion to Jane Austen* has a chapter on objects, by Barbara M. Benedict, and *Jane Austen in Context* has one chapter on consumer goods and another one on portraits. Criticism particularly on non-portable property in Austen's novels, however, remains severely limited. Alistair Duckworth wrote on the role of the estate in Austen's work, but his *The Improvement of the Estate* is almost fifty years old and does not consider the role of gender in the novels. Sandra Macpherson's article, "Rent to Own; or What's Entailed in *Pride and Prejudice*," focuses on the entail in the novel. Mirella Billi has written a short chapter on the topic of houses in Austen, as part of the collection *The House of Fiction as the House of Life*. Byrne's book touches briefly on the topic and Arnold's work on the Georgian country house also mentions it, but neither analyses it in detail. More recent interest in Austen and houses has been of a biographical nature and limited to non-academic work, as demonstrated by titles such as *Jane Austen at Home*, *At Home with Jane Austen* and *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends*.¹⁰ While, as these demonstrate, the concept of "home" is easily associated with Austen, discussion on the real homes she inhabited has taken precedence over the fictional homes she created.

My aim, therefore, is to bridge this gap in scholarship by calling attention to Austen's fictional landscapes, and her representation of the various forms of belonging that her female characters establish in them. Like Wynne's argument about women's feelings of ownership in the Victorian period, critics who have previously delved in the

¹⁰ Lucy Worsley. *Jane Austen at Home*. Hodder & Stoughton, 2017; Kim Wilson. *At Home With Jane Austen*. Frances Lincoln, 2014; Constance Hill. *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends*. Routledge, 1995.

relationship between Austen's female characters and the spaces they inhabit have considered their lack of a legal status over these properties as an impediment to the establishment of feelings of ownership and belonging towards it. Byrne considers the role that women in Austen's novels play in the management of the houses they inhabit and the interest they hold for these spaces to be inconsequential due to the fact that they will never be its legal owners (237). In her study on landscape in Austen's novels, the possibilities that Barbara Wenner sees for Austen's female characters' occupation of the spaces they inhabit are fundamentally passive: they can only ever "adapt" or "survive" in these spaces, with men being the only ones with the ability to consider their potential for control over them (4).

In contrast to these points of view, I argue that it is precisely the precariousness of the lives of Austen's main female characters (with the exception of Emma) that makes the representation of these characters' feelings towards property so compelling. Indeed, all of these characters hold a position in society characterised by some level of precariousness, with most of them experiencing some kind of dispossession throughout the novels. Catherine from *Northanger Abbey* is treated with cruelty when it is discovered that she is not an heiress. Belonging to a large family who is not able to leave her any property, Catherine is thus cast aside as a genteel woman with no fortune. The dispossession that is only threatened in *Pride and Prejudice* takes place in *Sense and Sensibility* when the Dashwood sisters are made to leave their home and accept their reduced circumstances. This theme of loss is constant throughout the novel, with various characters pitying the Dashwood sisters not because their current situation is without any comforts, but because it is so reduced from the one in which they previously found themselves. The simple fact that Austen characterises this as a loss is interesting, as none of the Dashwood women ever had a legal claim to their home. The potential for dispossession is very much a theme in *Pride and Prejudice* too, where the heroine, Elizabeth, is threatened with not just the loss of her family home but also of any source of income, since the £50 a year she is due to inherit will not be at her disposal until after her mother's death. *Mansfield Park* features the most vulnerable out of any of Austen's heroines. Forced to leave her parents' house, Fanny takes up a liminal position between her genteel cousins and the servants, a position that is symbolised by the spaces she occupies in the house. Whereas Fanny has no property to lose, the heroine of *Persuasion*, Anne, like Marianne and Elinor, suffers the loss of a property that she is deeply attached to, despite it not being legally hers. As this thesis

will demonstrate, Austen is evidently more interested in these kinds of characters, with *Emma* being the only novel centred around the character of a privileged woman. To Austen, lack of legal ownership of property makes these characters' feelings towards the spaces they inhabit more, not less, compelling.

Each of the chapters of this thesis focuses on a particular form of belonging to property. Chapter 1, "Owning," begins by considering Austen's portrayal of women who legally own the properties in which they live, more specifically Mrs. Ferrars from *Sense and Sensibility*, Lady Catherine from *Pride and Prejudice* and Lady Denham from *Sanditon*. These three characters are all portrayed unfavourably, which raises the question of why Austen chose not to offer a flattering depiction of female ownership of property. Indeed, in contrast to recent historical studies, which show that many women played an active role in the management of their properties and even in those of their husbands, these characters are not interested in actively managing or improving their properties. Austen also shows that they are not socially conscientious members of their community, thus revealing their lack of interest in the moral aspect of the role of owner of a large estate. Austen considers these two aspects to be inseparable, with an effective management being presented as necessarily virtuous, and vice versa. Austen's decision to portray these three propertied women as ineffective managers does not constitute a refusal of the idea of female ownership, however, since Austen characterises other female characters as effective in various aspects of the management of the properties in which they live. Instead, by juxtaposing characters such as these with those of the propertied women, Austen engages with the dialogue on the morality of property ownership. We know from Austen's letters that she was familiar with some of the conduct books which centred on the topic of female education. I argue that Austen was interested in this dialogue, and that through the portrayal of her propertied female characters she exposes the shortcomings of the current system of female education, which would inevitably make a woman unprepared for a role of such responsibility as that of owner of an estate. The final section of this chapter focuses on the character of Emma in the eponymous novel, Austen's only portrayal of a privileged heroine. *Emma*, which would appear to lack the secondary character of the privileged propertied woman present in the other three novels, instead represents Austen's innovation in her decision to make this figure the main character of the novel. While Emma does not yet own the house in which she lives, she will upon the death of her father, when it will be divided between her and her sister. In my analysis of Emma, I consider the similarities

that the heroine as a character shares with Austen's other propertied women. Setting out to portray a heroine that is deeply flawed, Austen resists the temptation to erase this complexity in her character and to portray her as a fully moral person.

The second chapter, "Managing," considers in greater detail the dialogue on moral management of property. It regards Austen as an author whose novels engage with this dialogue, but in a way that is far more complex than the simple prescription of certain values. The focus is placed on two of Austen's novels, through which she problematised questions regarding female property management. By the time Austen was writing her novels, conduct books directed at women had become a well-established and popular genre. Such books represent management as one of the few forms of access to property for women, and consequently of significant importance. While certainly didactic, these books describe the role of female household manager as encompassing multiple responsibilities and requiring a considerable number of abilities. My reading of such works thus seeks to contradict the idea that in Austen's period women were not expected to take an active part in property management, or that the dialogue surrounding domesticity was necessarily repressive towards women. These conduct books had various aspects in common, such as the attribution to the female manager of the responsibility of managing not just the economic but also the moral resources of the household.¹¹ A woman, therefore, would not only have been expected to adjust the household expenses to the family's income, but also to provide the younger members of the family, the servants and the more vulnerable members of the community with a moral example. Virtually every single conduct book author, regardless of political affiliation, also shared a discontent with the current system of female education, which they believed objectified women and consequently did not prepare them for any of the responsibilities that they would face as household managers. By analysing socio-historical sources of the period, I demonstrate how a correlation was established between the morality of the female household manager and the state of the household under her care. I then consider how Austen engages

¹¹ My use of the term "economic" throughout this thesis is in reference to Economics, the branch of knowledge that, as described in the *OED*, "deals with the production, distribution, consumption, and transfer of wealth." Whenever I use the term "financial" instead of "economic" I refer to "the management of money," to "pecuniary resources" and to Finance, defined in the *OED* as "the science which concerns itself with the levying and application of revenue." In cases in which I use both, such as when I speak of "economic and financial stability/prosperity/rectitude" it is because both terms are applicable and relevant.

with such ideas through her portrayal of two of her characters: Mrs. Norris from *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Clay from *Persuasion*. These novels both feature a female character who tries to take the position of household manager for herself, thus replacing the character that is presented as the legitimate manager. As I argue, Austen's representation of the complexities of the role of surrogate manager reflects her interest in the position of women within a system that restricts their opportunities for ownership. At the end of the novels, neither character is used to convey a moral lesson. Instead, Austen's ambiguity encourages her readers to consider the reasons why someone would be led to pursue a role that, despite offering certain opportunities, is also not without its limitations and precariousness.

Chapter 3, "Living," continues to explore the ways in which Austen portrays her female characters circumventing the limits imposed on them by the law in their occupation of spaces. This chapter starts by considering the prevalence of the representation of Austen as someone who values privacy but also the social, and whose writing process combines the two. Subsequently, it shows how the two aspects of solitude and sociability feature in Austen's conceptualisation of "living." I focus on the usage of the term "living" as a synonym for "being at home," but also as representing more than the mere physical occupation of space. As I demonstrate, Austen's employment of the term in this sense always involves the establishment of a link between the domestic space and the social, and encompasses the ideas on management discussed in the previous chapter. My analysis of both fictional and non-fictional contemporary sources reveals that many other authors also used the term in this way. Such texts focus on the subject of female accomplishments, a topic that generated great discussion at the time in which Austen was writing her novels. These authors took women's wish to use their decorative abilities in order to personalise the space in which they lived for granted, and enquired into the various uses for such abilities. They emphasise the porousness of the domestic space by expressing the idea that its improvement through the use of accomplishments would result in the establishment of a connection between the private space of the home and the public space of the neighbourhood. While the self is always presented as socially situated in these texts, women are shown to be the ones responsible for the establishment of this connection. I demonstrate that such conceptions of accomplishments and their application are not necessarily repressive for women, but can inclusively allow them to improve their faculties and develop an attachment towards the spaces they inhabit. I also argue that

Austen recognised the potential that sociability and the personalised occupation of space have for one's establishment of a sense of belonging towards the place where one lives. As I demonstrate, this potential is expressed in her portrayal of her single heroines. This chapter focuses on Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elizabeth and Jane in *Pride and Prejudice*, Fanny in *Mansfield Park* and Anne in *Persuasion*, and briefly considers Emma and Miss Bates from *Emma*. All of these characters, Emma excepted, experience dispossession or the threat of it at some point or other in the novel, and I am interested precisely in the ways in which Austen represents their resistance to this dispossession. Indeed, despite Austen being often accused of portraying singlehood as an undesirable state, for large parts of the novels these characters are not presented as thinking and wishing for a future house, but as content in their occupation of their father's, mother's, or uncle's house. I thus argue that Austen's fictional works are of an emancipatory character, as they do more than simply offer a commentary on contemporary debates about property, and instead fictionalise the ways in which the unpropertied single woman may create a sense of belonging and feelings of ownership towards the spaces she inhabits, despite the limitations the law imposes on her. Austen can consequently be seen to be doing more than exposing the unfairness of the current property system: she legitimises female property ownership by depicting a myriad of ways through which, by resorting to their ingenuity and abilities, women occupy the spaces in which they live and use them to create a sense of purpose for themselves and express their identity.

This thesis traces Austen's representations of women's forms of relationships towards property, from the actual to the imaginary, and so chapter 4, "Imagining," concludes with the imaginary. This final chapter analyses how Austen represents these characters conceptualising a potential future for themselves in a house other than that of their parents or another family member. Austen's first three novels, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* feature the heroine paying a visit to the prospective husband's house, during which she imagines herself in the position of mistress of that house. In contrast to what we have seen in the previous chapters, here it is the man, not the woman, who is judged based on his managerial and decorative abilities, with the space of his house also being presented as an expression of his taste and character. These episodes, though seemingly alike, hold significant differences which, altogether, represent a development in Austen's conception of their role within the novel. My analysis of Austen's exploration of the concept of "Imagining" in this

chapter shows that this particular relationship with property is grounded both in the present and the future, and is established by envisioning oneself taking possession of a certain space in a future time that may or may not materialise. I consider the ways in which Austen uses the novelistic format to encourage her readers to imagine a future for the characters at the same time as she depicts them imagining it for themselves. The idea that one could mentally take possession of a space that was not legally theirs is not original to Austen, as various fictional and non-fictional texts of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries express this idea. What is truly innovative in Austen's work is her use of a fictional text to represent this imaginative process as a kind of ownership that, though different, is as real and powerful as any other. With this chapter, this thesis comes full circle on the topic of ownership and ethical property management and its representation in Austen's novels. It demonstrates that Austen presents Catherine, Marianne and Elizabeth as possessing the ability for this management. In doing so, Austen clearly places herself in opposition to the idea that the ability to remain detached from the landscape, considered to be a prerequisite for a moral form of property ownership, was the prerogative of propertied aristocratic men. In contrast to many critics of Austen's novels, I show that the portrayal of these visits to the prospective husband's house and of the marriages that succeed them do not place the heroines in positions of subordination and limitation, but of control and potentiality. Through what I will demonstrate is an unmistakably emancipatory representation of the relationships of ownership and belonging women can develop towards the spaces they inhabit, Austen does more than just show female ownership to be heterogeneous and complex: she ultimately validates it.

CHAPTER 1: OWNING

In a letter to Cassandra, written from 30th June to 1st July 1808, Austen mentions the dispute over the inheritance of the Stoneleigh Abbey estate, which involved two of her family members, her mother's cousin Thomas Leigh, and Austen's uncle James Leigh-Perrot: "Mr. Tho. Leigh is again in Town – or was very lately ... He owned being come up unexpectedly on Business – which we of course think can only be one business" (Le Faye, *Letters* 143). Complications related to the will of the previous owner meant that Thomas Leigh's decision to take possession over Stoneleigh Abbey in 1806 was contested, and he was presumably in London to resolve this issue. Austen's uncle, James Leigh-Perrot, who had an equal right to the inheritance, is also mentioned in Austen's letter: "Mrs. Knight is kindly anxious for our Good, & thinks Mr. Leigh-Perrot must be desirous for his Family's sake to have everything settled" (143). Without the disposition to become a landowner, James Leigh-Perrot would eventually receive a payment of £20,000 and an annuity of £2000 to withdraw his claim to the estate. The two men would take some time to decide on the actual value of this payment and, while the argument over it took place, the Austen family had time to consider the ways in which this might potentially affect them. After the death of Mr. Austen in 1805, the Austen women were dependent to a large extent on contributions made to their income by Austen's brothers. Austen's mention of Mrs. Knight's being "kindly anxious" for them is indicative of the expectation, which the first probably shared, that James Leigh-Perrot would wish to contribute to the comfort of herself, her mother and sister, with this new influx of money. The Austens would be disappointed in their hopes not just at this time, but also in 1817, when the reading of James Leigh-Perrot's will would reveal that he had left the entirety of his fortune to his wife. The surviving children of Mrs. Austen would not receive a share of their uncle's fortune until 1837, twenty years after Austen's death. That Austen's mind at the time in which the letter was written was very much occupied with the topic of inheritances is made evident in her succeeding comment, which expresses her characteristic irony: "Indeed, I do not know where we are to get our Legacy – but we will keep a sharp look-out" (143).

Austen thus demonstrates that she was manifestly aware of her and Cassandra's comparatively strained circumstances, and of inequality not just within her own family but throughout society. Austen makes this discrepancy a theme in her narratives by way of a reversal: here, in her narrative economy, propertyless women are given a

central position and propertied women become secondary characters. This chapter aims to explore the generally unsympathetic portrayal of the latter in Austen's novels, and the particular case of Emma, who shares some of the unfavourable characteristics of Austen's elderly propertied women, as well as qualities that distinguish her from them. In contrast to the ways in which Georgian female owners of property have been represented in recent scholarly work on the period, the propertied women in Austen's novels are not portrayed as either active managers of their property or socially conscientious members of their community. Instead, they share various unfavourable characteristics, with most of them being described as despotic and arrogant. By refuting the idea that during the Georgian period women would not have been expected to manage their property, my purpose will be to show that Austen does not, as a rule, characterise the wealthy women in her novels as active and efficient managers of property because this would have been inconceivable. Instead, Austen's juxtaposition of unlikeable propertied secondary characters with the sympathetic unpropertied heroines constitutes an engagement on her part with contemporary questions regarding moral ownership of property. I will argue that, like other authors of the period more easily recognised as feminist, Austen was critical of the deeply flawed current system of female education, which made women incapable of undertaking the challenging task of managing property. By "management," a concept which I will analyse in closer detail in the following chapter, I refer not just to the administration of the various economic resources of a household, but also to the superintendence of its moral resources. The latter comprises the care over the education of the younger members of the family, the supervision of servants, and charitable work in support of the more vulnerable members of the community. The unfavourable portrayal of the propertied women in Austen's novels evidences the shortcomings at the heart of their inability to be efficient household managers and exemplary leaders in their communities. The exception to this juxtaposition of secondary characters and heroines is *Emma*, in which the future proprietor is central to the narrative. With this novel, Austen sets herself a challenge by centering it around a character that is, like the other propertied women, deeply flawed, but simultaneously sympathetic.

1.1 Propertied women in Austen

The third chapter of *Sanditon* opens with the declaration that “Every Neighbourhood should have a great Lady. – The great Lady of Sanditon, was Lady Denham” (304). This is followed by a description of Lady Denham: she is “a very rich old Lady, who had buried two Husbands, who knew the value of Money” (304). *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* also feature such a character as Lady Denham, an elderly woman who belongs to either the nobility or gentility and who has inherited extensive property, either from her husband or from an unspecified family member. This chapter will focus on Lady Denham, Lady Catherine from *Pride and Prejudice* and Mrs. Ferrars from *Sense and Sensibility*. These characters, unlike the heroines, hold a privileged position in society, since they all have full legal ownership over the considerable properties in which they live. As Alex Woloch affirms, social inequality and the disequilibrium it creates “has insinuated itself into the formal structure of Austen’s narratives,” where privileged women such as Anne de Bourgh, Lady Catherine’s daughter, who will inherit “very extensive property” are much “better off than [the] many girls with none” (60). And yet, Austen does not seem to be interested in creating novels about privileged, wealthy female characters. Instead, all of her narratives, with the exception of *Emma*, are centred around women of no property, who face a period of dispossession of some kind. As chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis will seek to demonstrate, Austen is interested both in the various forms of relationships towards property that women can establish within a system that severely restricts their access to it and in how they overcome these limitations. While certainly privileged, part of the irony in Austen’s representation of the characters of the propertied women is that although they belong either to the gentility or to the lower, not the higher aristocracy, their arrogance and sense of superiority over others is not diminished by this fact. This supercilious attitude, however, as Austen indicates, is not grounded on any innate qualities or real merit. As Peter Knox-Shaw affirms, in Austen’s novels “rank is no guarantee of worthiness, rather the contrary,” with *Emma* constituting “the exception to the rule in being admirable as well as magnetic” (213).

How can we account for Austen’s altogether unfavourable portrayals of wealthy propertied women, especially when juxtaposed with the favourable way in which the far less privileged heroines are depicted? According to Elsie B. Michie, the answer to this would be that Austen sees the plots of her novels as a means through which “fiction

attempts to counter worldly assumptions by leading readers to value virtue and poverty over wealth” (57). Consequently, “[i]n the looking-glass logic of Austen’s world, to have nothing that would make you desirable on the marriage market, to lack fashionable manners and the rank and possessions that accompany them, is, in fact, to have everything, to possess the value or virtue, the good manners, that will protect you from the corruptions of wealth” (39). Michie thus suggests that Austen criticises wealth and exposes its corruptive force in a person’s virtues and manners, while at the same time inviting her readers to value poverty. However, nowhere in her fiction does Austen romanticise poverty or present it as an indicator of virtue. In fact, there are several examples in Austen’s novels in which the morally reprehensible actions of a character are presented as understandable when motivated by poverty or fear of poverty. For instance, the poverty and ill health of *Persuasion*’s Mrs. Smith lead her to manipulate her friend Anne and encourage a marriage that would be potentially beneficial to her but disastrous to her friend. Similarly, in *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs. Bennet’s attempts at coercing Elizabeth into marrying Mr. Collins, unlike any manipulation of the sort exerted by Austen’s propertied women, is not unambiguously condemned, as Mrs. Bennet’s fear of poverty is the reason behind her objectionable behaviour.

Other critics have argued that female landowners in Austen’s period would have experienced ownership over property in very distinct ways from male landowners. Skinner argues that although women were not entirely barred from holding property, “it was assumed that their interest in it would be purely as a means of support” (103). Sandie Byrne agrees with this idea and states that women would not have been expected to manage their property themselves, as to do so would have been going against the contemporary representations of women “as creatures of emotion rather than reason,” which meant that they were denied “the prestige and modicum of political power that went with property, as well as the right to use it as capital” (214). Byrne adds that women in possession of estates were expected to “remain in relation to their property in a way quite different from that of a male owner”:

The woman obtained none of the political power that inhered in the land ownership, and was not expected to use the estate as a capital resource, or to “meddle” with the land, but to use only the income from the land and/or

interest. For a woman to live on and manage an estate without a man, whether relative or employee, would have been considered deeply eccentric. (239)

Thus, according to these two authors, the prejudices against female ownership of property in Georgian society would have prevented women from managing their own property. But were these limits on active engagement really so stringent?

Recent scholarly work on the period has demonstrated that many aristocratic and genteel women would have played an active role in the management of the estate, even when it was their husbands, and not them, who held legal ownership over the property. In her work on the Georgian country house, Arnold affirms that it was common for a woman to run the estate in her husband's presence, and provides the example of Lady Orrery, who undertook the task of running the estate permanently, and whose "actions and opinions are recorded in her regular letters to her husband" (85). Laurence similarly argues that most husbands appointed their wives as executors of their wills, and that if a man died intestate his widow was almost always appointed as the administrator of his estate, thus disproving the idea that women managing property would have been considered anomalous (235). According to Harvey, "women were expected to contribute to the family economy by providing 'clerical assistance' to male relatives in supportive and facilitative roles" (77). Susie Steinbach also argues against the stereotype of the languid female property manager by demonstrating the active role that aristocratic women played in the management of the household and within their communities. Steinbach states, for instance, that no aristocratic household would have been left entirely to the staff (86). Amongst other managerial tasks, the female manager would have met daily with the housekeeper, kept the household accounts, paid bills, ordered food and other supplies, and overseen the planning of events when the family entertained (88). Furthermore, Steinbach emphasises the important responsibilities that aristocratic women would have been expected to undertake as patrons of parish churches and philanthropists:

On the estate and in the surrounding community, aristocratic families were expected to provide for "their" poor, regardless of personal inclination. Philanthropy was for them an unavoidable duty. This had its roots in older traditions of paternalism as well as newer sources of inspiration such as evangelicalism and separate-spheres ideology. Ladies took their social duties

seriously, and were often quite deeply involved in charity, education, and the church on their country estates ... aristocratic women usually dispensed money, food, clothing and advice to their own poor ... (89)

Steinbach adds that the daughters of aristocratic ladies would have accompanied them in the discharge of these philanthropic duties, which would have been part of their education and preparation for their future roles as household managers. Vickery has also demonstrated the many ways in which women from the aristocracy to the middle classes contributed to the decoration and shaping of the interior of the houses in which they lived, despite lacking any legal right over these properties. Indeed, Vickery offers the example of “hand-written compendia for dishes, medicines, and household preparations” preserved in titled families as testimony of the continuity of female experience in estate management (*Behind Closed Doors* 160). Vickery additionally mentions various examples of women throughout the Georgian period who were responsible for commissioning building works in estates owned either by themselves or by their husbands.

Various works of scholarship have also argued against the idea that female ownership of property was atypical. As McDonagh explains, “[d]emographic circumstance coupled with the inevitable gap between legal theory and everyday practice meant that more women owned property than might be expected given the strictures of primogeniture and coverture” (4). McDonagh estimates that “somewhere in excess of 3 million acres in England were owned by women in the later eighteenth century and more than 6 million acres in Great Britain as a whole” (27) and that female landowners controlled approximately ten per cent of the land (32). “While always a minority,” McDonagh concludes, female landowners “were nevertheless a significant one” (32). Referring specifically to the aristocracy, Vickery states that during the Georgian period heiresses and widows were common amongst the nobility, where “as many as a third of all family seats came to women or passed down the female line” (*Behind Closed Doors* 132). As Vickery explains, “female access to family funds, ideas and autonomy was normal for a large minority of the patriciate” (132). Lewis affirms that, although “[i]t is difficult to know precisely how much landed property was owned by women at any given time,” she estimates that, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, female ownership of property peaked at fifteen to twenty per cent of the land (*Behind Closed Doors* 13).

While the exact numbers may be difficult to ascertain, all of this data demonstrates that property ownership by women was substantial. Existing evidence also indicates that these female property owners were far more active in the running of their estates than critics such as Skinner and Byrne have represented them to be. This is corroborated by Lewis, who argues that “[w]omen may have been the passive vessels through which property and power sometimes passed, but they were also active agents in the acquisition and maintenance of the family economy and the political power that sustained it” (3). While prejudices against female ownership of property did exist, as Lewis indicates, leading some to regard women as “passive vessels” of property, it is possible that these were not as pervasive as has been assumed. It also does not follow that, just because these preconceptions existed, all – or even most – women acted in accordance to them. Indeed, McDonagh’s recent scholarly work on female landowners contains numerous examples of women who were far from conforming to this mentality and who “constructed identities in relation to their ownership, and generally asserted their independent agency” (4). According to McDonagh, many female property owners kept “detailed estate accounts, rentals and ledgers” (40) instead of relying on a steward, some of them even using complex systems of accounting in the management of their estates (42). Elizabeth Prowse and the Duchess of Beaufort were both examples of such knowledge on the subject, having initiated systems of accounting that established bookkeeping practice for several decades, therefore benefitting future generations of owners (44-47). Jane More Molyneux of Loseley Park also sought to benefit future owners through her large quantity of notes which included lists of repairs and instructions for the maintenance of the estate (63). While more research is necessary on the topic, these works demonstrate that the idea that female owners of property, whether belonging to the aristocracy of the gentility, invariably adopted a passive role in the management of their own property or that of their husbands is unfounded.

The period of widowhood, in which the three characters this section focuses on find themselves was, according to Vickery, one of “unique independence and self-expression” for women (*Behind Closed Doors* 220). Due to this, it is even more curious that Austen, being in a position to portray female agency in property management, which she was sure to have witnessed, does not account for the duties of propertied women in positive and productive terms in her novels. As Michie argues, “rich women [in Austen’s novels] exhibit engrossment, while rich men demonstrate that it is possible

to be both wealthy and virtuous” (30). However, while Michie affirms that wealthy women in Austen represent “the material appeals that threaten to corrupt the moral sentiments” (30), her portrayal of these characters is more complex than this. The overall negative portrayal of propertied women in Austen contrasts with various other female characters in her novels who are either capable property managers or are shown to have the potential to become so, with the ability to actively and effectively manage property not being presented as something gendered. And yet, the connection to a grand domestic space works against these women’s subjectivity in the novels, as Austen gives them only secondary positions in the narrative, while the unpropertied women are given central positions. Whereas the heroines are portrayed as possessing moral qualities that would have made them conscientious property owners, Austen’s wealthy women share strikingly similar characteristics to each other that form an unsympathetic portrayal of women who inherit substantial property. By implying through her narratives that the heroines would have made much better use of the privileges and opportunities granted to the propertied women, Austen makes the inequality prevalent in society evident.

One of the characteristics of the ongoing dialogue on moral ownership and management of property in this period was the relationship of interdependence established between an effective property management and an ethical one. As Maria and Richard Edgeworth’s *Essays on Practical Education* demonstrates, conduct books put forward a bourgeois model of property management which stressed the importance of responsible spending, even for affluent aristocratic families: “‘Waste not, want not,’ is an excellent motto in an English nobleman’s kitchen. The most opulent parents ought not to be ashamed to adopt it in the economic education of their children; early habits of care, and an early aversion and contempt for the selfish spirit of wasteful extravagance may preserve the fortunes, and what is more important, the integrity and peace of noble families” (2: 398). But while the notion of responsible spending encompassed ideas of frugality, it also included that of generosity. Indeed, far from encouraging the accumulation of money, conduct book authors advocated economy as a means for the family to adjust their expenses to a budget in order to be able to finance charitable causes, as *Essays on Practical Education* demonstrates: “When we recommend economy and prudence to our pupils, we must, at the same time, keep their hearts open to the pleasures of generosity; economy and prudence will put it in the power of the generous to give” (1: 408). In doing so, the bourgeois mode of property

management established a connection between an effective (“economy and prudence”) and an ethical (“generosity”) use of resources. Both overspending in luxuries and hoarding of money were therefore considered to be immoral, since neither put a property owner or manager in a position to contribute to the improvement of the property or the lives of the inhabitants of the estate.

The lack of qualities in Austen’s propertied women which are essential to this ethical and effective form of property ownership points to an engagement on her part with the contemporary dialogue on female education. Indeed, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were characterised by the popularity of conduct books directed at men. Instructing men on questions as diverse as property management, investments and social conduct, this type of literature became extremely prolific. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, an entire genre of conduct books directed specifically at women had emerged. Authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Priscilla Wakefield, Hannah More, Jane West, Maria Edgeworth and Thomas Gisborne took on the task of writing on female conduct and the ways in which improvements in their education would allow them to become better human beings, wives, mothers, and household managers. With authors such as More, West, Edgeworth and Gisborne mentioned in her letters, Austen was evidently well-informed about these publications.¹² Such authors, though characterised by different political affiliations, criticised the current system of female education as adverse for women and society in general. These authors put forward suggestions for a new bourgeois system of female education, one which would counter what they saw as the flaws and excesses of the previous aristocratic ideas on female excellence. These authors criticised the practice of activities which consisted in placing the woman’s body on display since “[f]or a

¹² Austen expresses her distaste for More in a letter to her sister Cassandra on 24th January 1809, in which she comments on *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809): “You have my no means raised my curiosity after Caleb; – My disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real” (Le Faye, *Letters* 177). She also mentions one of More’s conduct books, *Practical Piety* (1811), in a letter written on 31st May 1818: “She appears very well pleased with her new Home – & they are all reading with delight Mrs. H. More’s recent publication” (200). In a letter to her niece Anna Austen on 28th September 1814, she expresses both her contempt for West and her admiration for Edgeworth, making it likely that she was at least aware of their conduct books: “I think I can be stout against any thing written by Mrs. West – I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth’s, Yours & my own” (289). She also praises Thomas Gisborne’s *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) in a letter to her sister from 30th August 1805: “I had almost forgot to thank you for your letter. I am glad you recommended ‘Gisborne,’ for having begun, I am pleased with it, and I had quite determined not to read it” (117).

woman to display herself in such a manner was the same as saying she was supposed to be valued for her body and its adornments, not for the virtues she might possess as a woman and wife” (Armstrong 75). As an alternative, conduct books at the beginning of the nineteenth century began to present the country house “not as the centre of aristocratic (male) power, but as the perfect realisation of the domestic woman’s (non-aristocratic) character” (75). A woman raised under this new system of education, therefore, would have both the knowledge and the authority to manage the economic resources of the household in a responsible and inconspicuous way that was in direct opposition to the practices of the old aristocratic system. As Armstrong affirms, “[u]nder the dominion of such a woman, the country house could no longer authorise a political system that made sumptuary display the ultimate aim of production” (75).

With this in mind, conduct book authors identified the flaws in the previous system of education which, as they saw it, prevented women from confidently and efficiently managing the economic resources of the household. In her 1696 *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, Mary Astell had already commented on the ignorance of arithmetic and business and the ways in which it prevents women from skillfully managing their property after the death of their husbands, leading so many families into what otherwise would have been preventable ruin:

... our Country-Men ... breed our Women so ignorant of Business, whereas were they taught Arithmetic ... it might prevent the ruine of many Families, which is often occasion’d to a Widow and Orphans, who understanding nothing of the Husband or Father’s Business, occasions the Rending and oftentimes the utter Confounding a fair Estate, which might be prevented, did the Wife but understand Merchants Accounts, and were made acquainted with the Books.
(15-16)

According to Astell, an improved education would allow women to undertake an efficient management of the family estate, thus preventing the pernicious ignorance and dependence that made them vulnerable when they found themselves widowed. In *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798), Priscilla Wakefield is just as critical in her exposition of the injurious effect of a lack of both a formal and a moral education. According to her, the faults in the current system of female education prevent women from becoming useful members of society. Wakefield quotes Adam

Smith, who declares that “every individual is a burthen upon a society to which he belongs, who does not contribute his share of productive labour for the good of the whole” (1). Wakefield ironically argues that, even though Smith mentions only men in his work, he could not possibly be excluding women, since “the female sex is included in the idea of the species, and as women possess the same qualities as men, though perhaps in a different degree, their sex cannot free them from the claim of the public for their portion of usefulness” (2). Acknowledging that most women of the higher classes do not contribute to society with the productive labour Smith mentions, Wakefield analyses the reasons for this: “The indolent indulgence and trifling pursuits in which those who are distinguished by the appellation of gentlewomen, often pass their lives, may be attributed, with greater probability, to a contracted education, custom, false pride, and idolising adulation, than to any defect in their intellectual capacities” (121). Wakefield thus argues against the idea that the reason behind women’s lack of contribution to society with productive labour is a gendered one. Instead, she presents it as a consequence of an education that has not prepared them for their day-to-day responsibilities: “The intellectual faculties of the female mind have been too long confined by narrow and ill-directed modes of education, and thus have been concealed, not only from others, but from themselves, the energies of which they are capable” (5). In her conduct book, *Plans of Education* (1792), Clara Reeve considers the consequences to a woman’s morals that originate from the lack of an appropriate education:

How often do we see these young girls come from these schools, full of pride, vanity, and self-consequence! – ignorant of the duties and virtues of a domestic life, insolent to their inferiors, proud and saucy to their equals ... without that sweet modesty and delicacy of mind and manners, which are the surest guards of female virtue, and the best omens of their future characters as wives, mothers and mistresses of families; and which nothing can compensate for the want of.

(136)

Reeve thus affirms that the current system of female education lacked not just a formal component but also a moral one that would allow women to understand their duties and to learn how to discharge them suitably.

Reeve also places emphasis on a particular consequence of the lack of an appropriate moral education: excessive pride and insolence to their dependents or people of lower social classes. Many other conduct book authors saw this as a serious fault in the current system of education, which resulted in tyrannical and inefficient female household managers. As Lewis explains, charitable work was regarded as “an appropriate extension of the ties and obligations that formed so large a part of upper class social and political life” (87). This was seen as the responsibility of the female manager, who was expected not just to set a moral example for her children and servants but also to alleviate the privations of the most vulnerable members of her community. As is emphatically declared by the character of Mrs. Stanley in the didactic *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* by Hannah More, which contains direct quotations from More’s conduct book, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*: “I have often heard it regretted that ladies have no stated employment, no profession. It is a mistake. *Charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession*” (emphasis in the original, 228). That this was an essential part of the role belonging to the female household manager is also corroborated in *The Country Housewife’s Family Companion* (1750), written by William Ellis, a farmer. According to Ellis, a good female manager would have “no Poor about her that escaped her Knowledge and her Charity; she comforted one and assisted another, she made one agree with the other, and composed all the Differences which were bred between them” (ix). Consequently, any faults in a woman’s education that prevented her from fully understanding her responsibilities towards the lower-class members of her community were considered as a serious problem by conduct book authors.

According to Wollstonecraft, by persuading women that they are naturally weaker than men and must, consequently, be controlled by them, women will develop a propensity to tyrannise those in more vulnerable positions than themselves: “Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannise, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength” (*Vindication* 7). This tendency, as Wollstonecraft explains, is not innate but rather an effect of the extremely flawed education they have received: “Women, it is true, obtaining power by unjust means, by practicing or fostering vice, evidently lose the rank which reason would assign them, and they become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants. They lose all simplicity, all dignity of mind, in acquiring power, and act as men are observed

to act when they have been exalted by the same means” (*Vindication* 48). This propensity to tyrannise other people due to a sense of superiority based on one’s wealth and rank is directly in opposition to the bourgeois model of female excellence put forward by conduct books in this period. According to these, the model household would “contest the prevailing system of status distinctions in order to insist on a discreet and frugal household with a woman educated in the practices of inconspicuous consumption” (Armstrong 72). One would be able to distinguish a woman’s good breeding, therefore, not from any external signs of wealth and rank, but through her knowledge and moral behaviour. Gisborne supports this idea in his *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) by arguing that a woman of rank needs to be taught the responsibilities that come with the privilege of a high position in society:

Let the pupil, who finds herself in this respect elevated above her companions, be led clearly to apprehend, and practically to remember, that the distinctions of rank in society are instituted not for the advantage and gratification of any individual, but for the benefit of the whole. Let her be taught that superiority, considered with a reference to the individual who is in possession of it, is accompanied with proportionate duties and temptations; that to possess it implies no merit, to be without it no unworthiness. (86-87)

Gisborne thus contends that a suitable moral education for a future female property manager would teach her that wealth and rank are not indicative of an inherent superiority over other people, but something that is “wholly unconnected with personal worth” (87).

In her portrayal of the propertied women in her novels, Austen not only engages with these ideas on the current system of female education, but may also have been inspired by a character of a female property owner from a work by another female novelist: Mrs. Rayland from Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House*. Throughout the narrative Smith especially emphasises the stationary state of Mrs. Rayland’s estate, as its owner has not contributed with any innovations or improvements towards it. This is relevant since the management of an estate was seen as a complex task which required the combination of maintenance with improvement. On one hand, the manager is expected to guarantee the economic and financial stability of the estate. However, on the other, with every new manager innovation and improvement in the

undertaking of their responsibilities are also expected. In *The Old Manor House*, Mrs. Rayland's inability to deliver this innovation, as well as her contentment with simply adopting the same forms of administration and methods as her predecessor, presents her as an inefficient manager: "With a very large income, and a great annual saving, her expenses were regulated exactly by the customs of her family. – She lived, generally alone, at the Old Hall, which had not received the slightest alteration, either in its environs or its furniture, since it was embellished for the marriage of her father Sir Hildebrand, in 1698" (7). Mrs. Rayland has not introduced any improvements to the decoration of the Hall, or any innovations to the forms through which it is administered. She is also described as being ignorant of her social responsibilities, as she merely practices the minimal amount of charitable work, according to the customs of previous owners, and has not considered doing anything else to benefit the most disadvantaged members of her community: "One only of the Mrs. Raylands now remained; a woman, who, except regularly keeping up the payment of the annual old alms, which had by her ancestors been given once a year to the poor of her parish, was never known to have done a voluntary kindness to any human being" (6). Mrs. Rayland is represented as being so unconcerned with the welfare of the poor in her community that she complains when prices in the neighbourhood rise, not because this increase will affect them but because, as she imagines, it will be pernicious to herself: "the vicinity of affluent luxury was thus severely felt by those to whom it was of much more real consequence than to Mrs. Rayland. To her, however, this circumstance was particularly grating. She complained bitterly to every body she saw, that poultry, if she had by any accident occasion to buy it, was doubled in price" (36). While Smith does not offer a detailed account of Mrs. Rayland's education, certain details in the description of her character indicate that hers was a deficient one. For example, Smith indicates that until Orlando, Mrs. Rayland's nephew, moved into the Hall, no inhabitant in the house had made any use of the library in a very long time by writing that the "great collection of books were never disturbed in their long slumber by any human being but himself" (9). While this moment in the novel emphasises the faults in her moral education, others do the same for her formal education: "Again, however, this symptom escaped Mrs. Rayland, who, tho' she read good books as a matter of form, and to impress people with an idea of her piety and understanding, cared very little about their purport, and was just then more occupied with the care of her foot than with abstract reasonings on the efficacy of faith" (27).

Other moments in the narrative also emphasise Mrs. Rayland's excessive pride about her family's rank in society and her prejudices towards people of different social backgrounds. She is thus described as someone who lacks both the knowledge and the moral principles to discharge her role of owner of a large estate in an efficient manner.

Although Austen, like Smith, does not provide her readers with specific details about the education her propertied women received, she offers indications as to its flaws through their characterisation. The first time the reader is introduced to Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice* is upon Elizabeth's visit to her estate, Rosings. Described by Mr. Collins as liking "to have the distinction of rank preserved" (124), Lady Catherine's inconsiderate treatment of her guests is unequivocally deliberate and meant as an assertion of her superiority of rank: "Her air was not conciliatory, nor was her manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance" (125). Through this declaration, Austen portrays Lady Catherine as someone who believes that her title and rank in society are valid claims to superiority over other people. The intimation that this is based on these factors and not on any real knowledge or abilities presents Lady Catherine as a recipient of the system of female education that conduct book authors wished to abolish. Her declaration that "[t]here are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste," and that had they ever learnt she and her daughter would have been "true proficient[s]" (133) constitutes another conscious way of distancing both of them from their guests by once again reminding them of their claims to superiority. This speech not only illustrates Lady Catherine's lack of good manners and social conscience. It also demonstrates that she regards rank as a source of inherent superiority over other people, precisely the opposite of what was argued by such conduct book authors as Gisborne, who states that rank "implies no merit, to be without it no unworthiness" (87).

Lady Catherine boasts of a knowledge in music whilst revealing at the same time that this knowledge is non-existent. This reveals that neither she nor her daughter were taught any of the accomplishments that were seen as part of the standard education of a woman belonging to the higher classes, and that Darcy considers to be essential in a truly accomplished woman. Anne plainly lacks the "thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages" which Caroline Bingley

mentions, or the habit of “[improving] her mind by extensive reading” (29), the importance of which Darcy emphasises. Without ever going into society or possessing the accomplishments which, alongside her fortune, would have made her attractive in the marriage market, Anne is wholly dependent on the success of her mother’s plan that she marry her cousin. By keeping her daughter at Rosings and preventing her from meeting any prospective suitors, Lady Catherine demonstrates full confidence that Darcy will marry Anne and, when she inherits, take over the entire management of the estate for her. The episode in which Anne forces Charlotte to brace the strong winter wind in order to speak to her, instead of entering the house, demonstrates that she is very much her mother’s equal in terms of a lack of consideration towards people of lower ranks in society, an indication that she too has received an unsuitable moral education. Anne’s sickly constitution can also be seen as an excuse for her complete avoidance of responsibility. In his 1790 *Essays on Fashionable Diseases*, James Makittrick Adair argued that certain diseases were often contrived amongst the higher social classes: “*Fashion* has long influenced the great and opulent in the choice of their physicians, apothecaries and midwives; but it is not so obvious how it has influenced them also in the choice of their diseases” (4). Austen also represents this contrivance in the character of Arthur in *Sanditon*, who pretends to be sickly in order to avoid having to work. Austen thus portrays Anne as someone who does not possess the inclination or the education necessary to manage Rosings once it is in her possession.

Lady Catherine is unfit to educate her daughter in these matters due to her own lack of both a formal and moral education suited to the responsibilities of an owner of a large estate. Much like with her other propertied women, Austen indicates that Lady Catherine has maintained the estate in precisely the same way that she received it, and has not contributed to it with any innovations of her own. Through her portrayal of Lady Catherine, Austen may be consciously establishing a connection between her character’s ideas on property management and those of Edmund Burke. Indeed, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke states that “[b]y a traditional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives” (29). For Burke, innovation is condemnable, as it goes against these inherited traditions: “A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views” (29). By attributing a passive inheritance to such an unsympathetic character as Lady Catherine, Austen can be seen to be criticising the

Burkean defence of imperceptibly gradual change in place of innovation, as well as the idea that England's system of inherited traditions offers an image of natural order.

Significantly, whenever Mr. Collins communicates details about Lady Catherine's boasts on the external signs of wealth to be found at Rosings, they are always alterations for which Lady Catherine's late husband, not herself, was responsible. An example of this is when Mr. Collins calls the attention of the group to the windows of Rosings and informs them "of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis de Bourgh" (124). By making Lady Catherine the obvious source of this information, Austen also presents Rosings and its owner as representatives of a system where "sumptuary display [is] the ultimate aim of production" (Armstrong 75). Lady Catherine does not discuss any ways in which her late husband may have contributed with improvements to the estate or the wider community in which it is situated, but instead focuses simply on sumptuous external signs of wealth that denote the family's rank in society. These, as Austen later shows by contrasting them to the architecture and decoration of Darcy's estate, are futile, because meant only for display.

Austen offers indications as to the flaws in Lady Catherine's education by demonstrating that she lacks not just a suitable formal education but also a moral one, which would have made her aware of her duties as the owner and manager of a large estate. Indeed, this is clear in Austen's description of her discharge of her philanthropic duties, which is fraught with irony:

Elizabeth soon perceived that though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the country, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty. (130)

Ruth Perry has described both Lady Catherine and Mrs. Ferrars as "parodies of male authority" (88). In this excerpt, however, Austen presents Lady Catherine as a parody of the socially paternalistic mode of philanthropy. In contrast to Gisborne, who argues that rank comes with a responsibility towards those less privileged, Austen intimates through the use of irony that in the discharge of her duty Lady Catherine is neither

charitable nor understanding, but only authoritative and condescending. As the excerpt indicates, Lady Catherine does not listen to the concerns of the tenants in her estate or offer them financial support if they need it, which indicates that these visits are not done out of genuine concern for their welfare but out of a necessity to display her superiority of rank. Moreover, while she may have undertaken the task of employing Mr. Collins, who carries “the minutest concerns” of her tenants to her, Lady Catherine is not described as being involved in the concerns of the parish church, or the management of her estate more generally, in any other way. Indeed, the irony in the expression “most active magistrate in her own parish” indicates that she does not contribute with any useful work to her community. Lady Catherine’s behaviour towards her tenants can also be seen as a perversion of what conduct book authors like Ellis presented as commendable philanthropic work. Ellis’s female model of excellence would have “no Poor about her that escaped her Knowledge and her Charity; she comforted one and assisted another, she made one agree with the other, and composed all the Differences which were bred between them” (ix). Like the woman Ellis describes, Lady Catherine is very much aware of any poor around her community who are in need of “her Knowledge and her Charity.” However, she demonstrates through her actions that she is in possession of neither the knowledge that would allow her to offer these people advice, nor an awareness of her duty that would make her wish to contribute to their wellbeing. She too “[composes] all the Differences” between her tenants, but by contemptuously silencing them.

Lady Catherine is not the only “great lady” who lacks the formal and moral education to perform her duty suitably. In *Sanditon* Austen introduces Lady Denham as someone who was “born to Wealth, but not to Education” (304). Indicating merely that, whilst single, she had been “a rich Miss Brereton,” Austen does not offer any information as to what social class Lady Bertram’s family belongs (304). Austen’s irony comes through in the description of Lady Bertram’s mercenary motives for marrying her much older first husband, Mr. Hollis, “a man of considerable property in the Country”: “Her motives for such a Match could be little understood at the distance of forty years, but she had so well nursed and pleased Mr. Hollis, that at his death he left her everything – all his Estates, and all at her Disposal” (304). Lady Denham then receives her title from her second husband, Sir Harry Denham. She thus shares the widowed status with the other two propertied women, one which has given her full control over extensive property. She shares also the same haughtiness due to her rank

that Lady Catherine and Mrs. Ferrars possess, as she is described by Mr. Parker, a character who is sympathetic towards her, as possessing “a little self-importance” (304).

In her novels, Austen contrasts this deficient formal education that the propertied women receive with the superior upbringing of other characters. In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, it is indicated that Catherine has received lessons in arithmetic from her father, something recommended by Reeve in her conduct book. While Austen offers no indication that these three propertied women received any such preparation, other wealthy female characters in her novels do appear to have been educated in this subject. Whereas Emma must have a fair knowledge of it in order to manage her father’s estate on her own, the reader is also informed in *Persuasion* that Lady Russell, in order to advise Sir Walter on how to administer his estate, “drew up plans of economy [and] ... made exact calculations” (13). Lady Russell may only be a secondary character, but here Austen portrays her as someone with knowledge of both economics and arithmetic. Despite their other flaws, the portrayal of Emma and Lady Russell is, in contrast to that of the other three women, generally favourable, something which is partially connected in Austen’s terms to their superior formal education.

In describing the failure of these women to manage their property actively, Austen reveals their lack of preparation for the positions of great responsibility they now hold. Lady Catherine, as has been demonstrated, mentions only her husband’s contributions to the estate, an indication that she has not been responsible for any of her own. That the same is true of Lady Denham is made clear when she declares that she has not attempted to introduce any innovations in the management of her estate, but simply adopted her husband’s forms of administration: “I am not a woman of parade, as all the world knows, and if it was not for what I owe to poor Mr. Hollis’s memory, I should never keep up Sanditon House as I do; – it is not for my own pleasure” (181). Lady Denham thus appears to regard herself merely as a holder of the estate until it is inherited by the next owner, as she continues to spend the same amount of money and employ the same number of people, despite considering it excessive, simply because it is in accordance with the previous owner’s form of management. Indeed, any details provided on Lady Denham’s administration of the economic resources of the estate are used merely to illustrate her avarice. Much like Mrs. Rayland in Smith’s novel, Lady Denham is shown to be obsessed with the cost of things and concerned about any potential increase in them, despite the unlikelihood that such

an increase would ever be pernicious to her. Indeed, she is shown to be concerned about the prospect of a rise in the price of butcher's meat because, as she affirms, she has "such a Servants' Hall full to feed" (318). The fact that her avarice makes her an unfair mistress to her servants is also indicated through her declaration that she will not accommodate any of her relatives into her house, since if the servants had more work "they would want Higher Wages" (325). In *Sense and Sensibility* Mrs. Ferrars is also presented as someone who is far from being active in her community, as she resides permanently in London and regards her estate merely as a source of income. The only time in which the estate is mentioned by Austen is during Mrs. Ferrars's attempt at persuading her son Edward to give up his engagement to Lucy Steele, in which it is used as a bribe. Her administration of her estate and the income that comes from it is never mentioned in the novel, except when Mrs. John Dashwood describes her reluctance to pay annuities to her former servants: "Her income was not her own, she said, with such perpetual claims on it; and it was the more unkind in my father, because, otherwise, the money would have been entirely at my mother's disposal" (7). Whereas maintaining former servants would have been considered part of the responsibilities of the owner of an estate, Mrs. Ferrars only discharges the annuities to the three servants because it was stipulated in her husband's will. Like Mrs. Rayland's annual alms to the poor, Mrs. Ferrars's duty towards her servants would most certainly have been left unperformed had the choice been hers. In the management of their estates, these women thus go against Wakefield's declaration that a woman's gender "cannot free [her] from the claim of the public for their portion of usefulness" (2) as they are shown to reject the responsibilities that naturally come with their roles. As June Sturrock argues, "[u]sefulness and exertion are important principles implicit throughout Austen's novels, as applied to both the practical and the moral life," with these two values being presented as essential for both men and women (47-48). By portraying them as unknowledgeable, indolent and self-centred, Austen intimates how wealth and status are devoid of any real value or merit when their possessor refuses the responsibilities that come with them.

Wakefield also complained in her conduct book of "The indolent indulgence and trifling pursuits in which those who are distinguished by the appellation of gentlewomen, often pass their lives" (121), something that is applicable to these characters as well. Indeed, due to lack of a worthwhile use for their time, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Ferrars and Lady Denham all evidence the willingness to tyrannise

that Wollstonecraft attributed to women whose minds had been weakened by a faulty system of education. These despotic propensities are also combined in these three women with the pride and insolence criticised by Reeve, and the belief that rank determines merit, against which Gisborne argued. This belief is clear in Lady Catherine, who considers that by having Elizabeth as its mistress, “the shades of Pemberley” would be “polluted” (273) and in Mrs. Ferrars, whose obsession with social status leads her to attempt to force both of her sons to marry Miss Morton, the daughter of a nobleman with a large fortune of her own (273). Lady Denham is also characterised by her business partner as self-important, a trait that he attributes to the value she places on her newly obtained title (304). As a result of their poor formal and moral education, the lives of these propertied women are characterised by an apathy that can be ascribed to the lack of useful activity in their lives. Having been “degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence” (*Vindication* 7) as Wollstonecraft phrases it, their time is instead taken up with the management of superficial concerns, such as controlling the lives of the people around them. Consequently, Lady Catherine attempts to arrange the marriages of members of the younger generations of her family, justifying her interference in her nephew’s affairs by declaring that it is Darcy’s “duty” and “what he owes to himself and to all his family” to marry her daughter and unite his estate with the one she will inherit upon her death (270). Arguing that this would not only be according to her wishes, but also those of Darcy’s late mother, Lady Catherine appears to be truly convinced that her rank and position in society entitles her to manipulate marriages in order to consolidate her daughter’s status in society and consequently that of the de Bourgh family. In possession of all of her husband’s fortune, Mrs. Ferrars likewise has the power to decide when or if her son Edward will inherit, and uses it in an attempt to impose a marriage partner upon him and choose his profession, disinheriting him when he opposes these plans. Lady Denham holds a comparable power over Sir Edward, the nephew of her second husband, Sir Harry, who allows her the liberty of selecting a wealthy wife for him, regarding it as the price for the inheritance he expects her to leave him.

Placed in a role that is as challenging to them as it is to men, but without the advantages of a suitable education to prepare them for it, Austen’s propertied women repeatedly reveal themselves to be inadequate in the performance of the duties that come with their roles. In intimating that these women have interiorised the prejudice that female owners of property must remain as merely holders of it until it is taken over

by a male heir, Austen presents their faulty education, not their gender, as the reason behind this. Similarly, Austen's characterisation of these propertied women does not merely depict wealth and rank as necessarily corruptive, but instead demonstrates how empty and futile these privileges are when not accompanied by the education and preparation that would allow these women to make good use of them. Through her contrast of these three deeply flawed women who received a poor education with heroines such as Emma and Anne, as well as other wealthy propertied women such as Lady Russell, who are all portrayed as well-educated and extremely capable property managers, Austen exposes prejudices against female ownership of property as unfounded. While Austen most certainly engages with ideas on female education as presented by didactic works, her portrayal of the propertied women in her novels does not have a didactic goal in mind. Although it is not possible to know what ending she had in mind for *Sanditon*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* both close with the two propertied women not only not being punished for their actions, but being welcomed into the home of the very couple they attempted to tyrannise and separate. Austen thus awakens her readers to the complexity and heterogeneity of women's relationships towards property.

1.2 Emma

In contrast to *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sanditon*, *Emma* does not feature a widowed or unmarried propertied woman. Mrs. Churchill, albeit appearing to share some of the personality traits of Lady Catherine, Lady Denham and Mrs. Ferrars, cannot be included in this category for two reasons: first, she is a married woman who never owns property, as she dies before her husband, and second, because the reader does not get to know her, only receiving information about her from characters whose opinion cannot be considered impartial. These are Mr. Weston and Frank Churchill, who both have reasons to dislike her, and, on one occasion, Isabella Knightley, who does not know her personally. The position of the two-dimensional character of the propertied woman would appear, therefore, to be left unfulfilled. However, Emma, the heroine of the novel, will inherit half of her father's property when he dies, the other half going to her sister, Isabella, property which, if protected by a trust, would be separate from that of her future husband. In contrast to her earlier novels, in *Emma*

Austen challenges herself to write a novel centred around the character of an extremely privileged woman. Published only a year after *Mansfield Park*, the heroines of these two novels could not possibly be more different. While *Mansfield Park* features Austen's poorest and more precariously-positioned character, *Emma* features her wealthiest. Austen presents Emma as possessing both the potential to become a positive influence in her community as well as prejudices and traits that may turn her into the sort of powerful woman who does not organically belong to her community, much like the propertied women in Austen's earlier novels. If, as Woloch affirms, "Power is earned through attention" then Emma, as the main character, is in a position more privileged than the other wealthy women (60). As Frances Ferguson affirms, it is through free indirect speech that Austen brings us much closer to this character than to any other in the novel (529). The reader has access to Emma's thoughts and feelings, her qualities and faults, which altogether make her a complex character and, ultimately, a likeable one.

Unlike the other propertied women, Emma has received a suitable formal education, which is clear from her ability to manage her father's household on her own. As Austen indicates, Emma has been "mistress of his house from a very early period" (5). She has also received a good formal and moral education from her governess, Miss Taylor, through which she has developed qualities that fit her to become a capable property manager. Mr. Knightley, who is not blind to the heroine's faults, recognises that the values fostered by Miss Taylor have made Emma a principled person: "Nature gave you understanding: – Miss Taylor gave you principles. You must have done well" (363). However, Emma is described from the very first page of the novel as deeply flawed: "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (3). With the exception of Mr. Knightley, all of the people who know Emma are only too willing to consider her as faultless. Mrs. Weston, who has raised her, sees nothing but perfection in her, as she has "such affection for her as could never find fault" (4) and the same can be said of Emma's father, who constantly flatters her. Emma's relationship with her father also constitutes a danger to her personal growth due to the confining nature of her life, which is mostly spent at home, attending to him, something highlighted by Margaret Kirkham: "Emma's misdeeds are the result of her staying at home in an environment which makes it difficult for her to grow up; her errors of judgement about social relationships in general are the direct outcome of

the infantile role she plays as perfect daughter” (136). Hypochondriacal and self-absorbed, Mr. Woodhouse is often blind to social norms, a characteristic which is evidenced in his refusal to offer any food he does not eat himself to his guests, or his reluctance to be hospitable to his neighbours. Even though Emma knows better than to sanction these discourtesies, Austen presents her relationship with her father as one of the factors preventing her from taking up an active role in her community.

From the very first pages of the novel, Austen also indicates that Emma actively pursues matchmaking, a trait she shares with the other propertied women. Not only does she take pleasure in her attempts to arrange Mr. Weston’s and Miss Taylor’s courtship, and congratulates herself on the success of her efforts when the two get married, but she similarly attempts to manage Harriet’s romantic life. This obsession with matchmaking is presented as a sign of the futile lifestyle criticised by Wakefield, which prevents her from becoming a useful member of her community. Out of all the propertied women in Austen’s novels, however, Emma is the only one who is involved in the concerns of the parish church of her community and in the philanthropic work which, as authors such as More and Ellis demonstrate, was considered to be part of the responsibilities of a genteel woman. One excerpt towards the end of the novel – “Then having resource to her workbasket” – indicates that Emma sews clothes for the poor (370). Other episodes describe Emma as an empathetic and considerate leader in her community, who contributes with money, food and advice to the wellbeing of the poor:

Emma was very compassionate; and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse ... In the present instance, it was sickness and poverty together which she came to visit; and after remaining there as long as she could give comfort or advice, she quitted the cottage with such an impression of the scene as made her say to Harriet, as they walked away,

“These are the sights, Harriet, to do one good. How trifling they make every thing else appear! – I feel now as if I could think of nothing but these poor creatures all the rest of the day; and yet, who can say how soon it may all vanish from my mind?”

“Very true,” said Harriet. “Poor creatures! one can think of nothing else.”
(70)

Emma and Harriet subsequently encounter Mr. Elton, who defers his own visit to the poor in order to accompany them. This description of Emma's visit to them illustrates her potential to become a real improver of her community, as well as her awareness of the importance of philanthropic work. Austen shows that Emma genuinely cares for the most vulnerable people in Highbury and her duty towards them by intimating that she is affected by the scene of poverty and sickness she witnesses, unlike Harriet, who merely repeats what she says. Besides being the only propertied woman in Austen who is depicted undertaking charitable work, Emma is also the only one who appears to show genuine concern for the poor. Nevertheless, these concerns are soon put aside when Mr. Elton joins them, which represents the shift in her attention from charitable work to matchmaking. Although Emma and Elton discuss the poor she has just visited, she soon forgets about their sufferings, as in her mind they become part of a scheme to bring Mr. Elton and Harriet together: "'To fall in love on such an errand as this,' thought Emma; 'to meet in a charitable scheme; this will bring a great increase of love on each side. I should not wonder if it were to bring about the declaration'" (71). While Emma's compulsion to control other people's lives through matchmaking associates her with the other propertied women, the honesty and self-awareness expressed through her interrogation "and yet, who can say how soon it may all vanish from my mind?" ultimately distinguishes her from them. Austen here indicates that no one, however virtuous, will only ever have entirely selfless thoughts, and that Emma is no exception. She thus complicates the idea of morality by portraying her heroine as a convincingly imperfect character, who is aware of her faults and oversights but who simply finds them too difficult to overcome.

Emma is also prevented from organically belonging to her community by her neglect towards those who would greatly benefit from her assistance, particularly Miss and Mrs. Bates, who live in comparative poverty:

Mrs. and Miss Bates loved to be called on, and she knew she was considered by the very few who presumed ever to see any imperfection in her, as rather negligent in that respect, and as not contributing what she ought to the stock of their scanty comforts.

She had many a hint from Mr. Knightley and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency – but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being

very disagreeable, – a waste of time – tiresome women – and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury, who were calling on them for ever, and therefore she seldom went near them. (121)

The excessive pride about her rank, which keeps Emma from performing her duties, is here made apparent through free indirect speech. The use of the words “horror” and “danger,” which communicate Emma’s sentiments towards the visits she pays these neighbours, as well as “second rate” and “third rate,” is illustrative of Emma’s snobbery. The expression “seldom went near them” also suggests a danger of contamination. All of these express Emma’s pride of rank and disdain of people of a lower rank in society than herself, which she has in common with the other wealthy women in Austen’s novels. Emma clearly regards her attentive gestures towards the Bates family as optional, an idea against which the previously mentioned conduct books argue by presenting charitable work not as a matter of inclination, but a duty that the wealthy families were expected to perform. In particular, the conduct books attributed this responsibility to the mistress of the house. Diverse circumstances in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century society made this kind of assistance essential. E. P. Thompson, for example, draws attention to the riots “occasioned by bread prices, tolls and other grievances” (66), whereas John Barrell argues that various factors contributed to many parishes having more labourers than could be employed, which meant that part of the population would have been dependent on charity (*Dark Side* 4).¹³ The indication that Mr. Knightley has pointed Emma’s neglect out to her demonstrates that he considers philanthropic work to be a duty. However, Austen also intimates that this merely constitutes a reminder of what Emma already knows, since inklings as to this neglect also come from herself (“from her own heart”). Once again, it is this ability for self-reflection and self-awareness that makes Emma a more complex character than the other propertied women. In contrast to Emma, neither of these characters see anything condemnable in their neglect and disdain towards people of a less privileged position in society. Austen thus refuses to sacrifice Emma’s complexity

¹³ In *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, John Barrell affirms that “The steep rise in population, the decline of the outworker system in the face of the greater mechanisation of the textile trades, and the system of parochial settlement, meant that in many parishes there were more labourers than could be employed, who became wholly or partly dependent on public and private charity” (4).

as a character and to portray her as a thoroughly moral person. Instead, she portrays Emma as someone who is unreservedly human, and who much as she understands the importance of philanthropy and kindness towards one's neighbours, cannot help but find superficial and selfish concerns such as matchmaking entertaining and compelling.

This self-awareness is present even in the moment Emma's neglect of other people rears its ugly head: the picnic at Box Hill, where her unfeeling remarks towards Miss Bates earn her the remonstrance of Mr. Knightley. As Austen would have known only too well, being the daughter of a clergyman, the life of a woman such as Miss Bates would have changed dramatically after her father's death, this event having left her and her mother without their home and with barely enough money to maintain a genteel lifestyle. Having once held a prestigious position in their community and taken an active role in the organisation and performance of charitable work, they are now the ones to be thankful for the attentions paid to them. As Maggie Lane affirms, "From being an important person in the local community, a clerical widow could find herself not only homeless and penniless, but without a public role or social standing" (78-79). Constantly surrounded by reminders of their comparative poverty, common courtesy dictates that Miss Bates, alongside her mother, be treated in a way that demonstrates that they are not regarded by their neighbours as their social inferiors. Fully aware that Miss and Mrs. Bates must be treated in a way that demonstrates appreciation for all they contributed to the community when their position in society was more prestigious, Mr. Knightley alerts Emma to the thoughtlessness of her actions.

This particular episode in the novel has led Marilyn Butler to regard the relationship between Emma and Mr. Knightley as a paternalistic one. According to Butler, a marriage with Mr. Knightley "would mean submitting to continued moral assessment by a mature man, who would fortify the stronger, more rational, objective, and stringent side of Emma's mind" (252). Johnson has argued that, though the novel "begins with the assumption of a broad arena for legitimate and useful female rule independent from masculine supervision, then, it does not end with the assertion of its sufficiency" (140). And yet, Mr. Knightley is not presented as morally superior to Emma, since the narrator indicates that his actions have been influenced by his jealousy for Frank Churchill: "He had been in love with Emma, and jealous of Frank Churchill, from about the same period, one sentiment having probably enlightened him as to the other" (340). Emma's relationship with Mr. Knightley is also not one of

submission, but rather one in which both regard each other as equals, as I demonstrate later in this chapter.

More recent pieces of criticism have argued against the idea that in the novel Emma undergoes a process of personal development at all. Andrew McInnes affirms that “Austen makes Emma’s lack of submission to industry and patience (and Mr. Knightley), and the supremacy of her fancy over both her understanding and the understandings of others, the impetus driving the plot of the novel and one of the lasting pleasures of the text,” and that “Emma’s attempts to chastise herself and discipline her imagination are doomed to failure” (79). Galperin also states that the narrative is “far from one of real change” (190). Far from being portrayed as Emma’s morally superior mentor through a process of moral development, Mr. Knightley is at best there to remind Emma of what she already knows. This is made clear through her reaction to his rebuke, which demonstrates her to have always been aware of her moral responsibilities: “Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life” (296). Mr. Knightley is thus not presented as Emma’s “moral assessor,” but as her only intellectual equal in Highbury, their marriage bringing an end to the “intellectual solitude” (6) that characterised Emma’s life in her father’s house after the departure of her governess. He is, simultaneously, the only person who can remind Emma of her responsibilities, as he is the only landowner of a large estate in Highbury who understands the importance of social responsibility and regards it as an essential part of his role.

Kirkham concludes that at the closing of the novel Austen presents Emma as “a heroine whose qualities fit her to become mistress of Donwell Abbey and to marry Mr. Knightley not as a shrew or an idiot, now reformed and subservient, but as one in whom he, rightly, recognises an equal” (131). But while Austen portrays the couple as equals, she does not present Emma as someone who is necessarily prepared for her role as mistress of Donwell. When Emma visits Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley’s estate, Austen ironically writes that this is “a house and grounds which must ever be so interesting to her and all her family” (281). The irony lies in Emma’s difficulty in admitting her true feelings for Mr. Knightley, which leads her to speak of Donwell not as her future home but as the inheritance of her eldest nephew. Austen describes Emma’s approval of the estate, from its tasteful style of interior decoration and its considerable dimensions, to the signs of its natural prosperity, such as its “abundance

of timber in rows and avenues” (281), its strawberry beds and its “broad short avenue of limes” (283). Subsequent paragraphs reinforce Emma’s admiration for the estate:

The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; – and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it.

It was a sweet view – sweet to the eye and the mind. (283)

As chapter 4 demonstrates, three of Austen’s novels feature a prospect scene, in which the heroine admires the extent of the property owned by the prospective husband from a vantage point: *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. In these episodes, Austen engages with the conception of society as landscape. According to this conception, which I will analyse in detail in that chapter, society could be compared to a landscape where, from the right viewpoint, one could see the various objects that constitute it as a harmonious whole. The only person who was considered to possess this ability was, Barrell argues, the propertied aristocratic gentleman, as his lack of profession and self-interest would make him impartial and, consequently, capable of taking up that position outside of the landscape, from which he could visualise it in its entirety. Here, Austen places Emma in the same vantage position, but to a very different effect. In similarity to the heroines from the other three novels, Emma is also depicted as being able to visualize the whole extent of the estate from a high eminence (“The considerable slope”). The presence of Abbey-Mill Farm is extremely significant, as it presents Donwell as an estate that does not evidence any of the kind of landscape improvement which “effaces the real through an unwillingness to confront the facts of the work and social world recorded in the landscape” (S. Byrne 224). Indeed, Austen significantly chooses to represent Donwell as a place in which the source of its prosperity is not hidden, and where a relationship of interdependence is established between the owner, Mr. Knightley, and his tenants. The indication that Emma finds this view “sweet to the ... mind” suggests an approval on her part of Mr. Knightley’s form of management. Unlike the other three heroines, however, Emma does not mentally place herself in the position of mistress of the estate she is surveying

and contemplate a potential future in which she will be able to manage it. Austen, therefore, does not position Emma in this vantage position to convey her abilities as a property manager but simply to indicate that she finds Mr. Knightley's estate aesthetically pleasing. In contrast to the other novels, in *Emma* Austen does not offer any indication that the heroine has the potential to embody an ethical form of property management through the prospect scene.

After the marriage to Mr. Knightley, only one thing stands between Emma and her future happiness at Donwell: her father. Perry has stated the following about this creative decision of Austen's: "In what could be construed as a regressive move for Emma, the new couple decide they will remain at Hartfield with her father ... Mr. Woodhouse's authority will protect Emma, one feels, from the worst excesses of Knightley's exasperating correctness. Her father will weigh in on her side, and help her maintain a proper balance of power" (90). Perry's argument, however, is both a misrepresentation of the relationship between Emma and Mr. Knightley, whose equality is emphasised throughout the novel (particularly at its conclusion), as well as of Mr. Woodhouse, who at no point exercises any form of authority. Anti-climactic as it may seem for the novel to end with Emma still living in Hartfield, it is perfectly consistent with the rest of the narrative. Indeed, having portrayed Emma as a conscientious and caring daughter throughout the novel, it would have been inconsistent for Austen to conclude it with the heroine's decision to move immediately to Donwell, as this would have expressed a lack of consideration for her father's feelings. Strictly opposed to any form of change, Mr. Woodhouse would have been devastated had his daughter abandoned him. Although at the end of the novel Mr. Woodhouse is still alive, it is possible to deduce that Emma and her sister Isabella will, after his death, jointly inherit Hartfield. Mr. Woodhouse's excessively cautious nature and his general dislike for marriages intimates that he would establish a trust for both of them, which would guarantee that the property would belong exclusively to his daughters and be kept out of the control of their husbands. Whilst Austen does not give any indication as to how long Emma will remain in Hartfield, there is no reason to suppose that, as Sandie Byrne affirms, Emma "is likely to move to Donwell Abbey and to allow Isabella to have Hartfield, if Mr. John Knightley is willing to give up his London legal practice" (4). By not punishing Emma for any of her mishaps at the end of the novel Austen continues to demonstrate that her intention was never to depict a process of personal development. Instead, she complicates the good/bad binary by

making a character that shares so many of the prejudices and the faults of her tyrannical propertied women thoroughly likeable. Emma is certainly flawed, but it is her humanity that captures the interest of the reader. For this reason, it makes sense for Austen to conclude the novel in the open-ended manner she does, with Emma unaltered and her readers unsure as to what kind of person and property manager she will become. Given what we know of Emma, she could just as easily become a kind and conscientious mistress, a despot, or anything in between, and this is precisely what makes her and the novel in which she features so compelling.

The ways in which Austen blurs the line between right and wrong in her portrayal of the gendered ways in which women relate to the spaces they inhabit is also the focus of the following chapter, which considers the characters of Mrs. Norris from *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Clay from *Persuasion*. In contrast to the characters analysed in this first chapter, neither Mrs. Norris nor Mrs. Clay will ever be the legal owners of the properties to which they become attached. By moving on to analysing Austen's depiction of relationships towards property that are not legally sanctioned, I argue that she invites her readers to consider the intricacy of something that if seen exclusively from a legal perspective would appear to be straightforward: ownership.

CHAPTER 2: MANAGING

In *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981) Butler famously presented Austen as a conservative who expressed in her novels the ideas she acquired from conduct books: “Her reading, in sermons and conduct-books, must have given her old-fashioned notions of social cohesion and obligation, such as were still invoked, when it suited them, by conservative propagandists like Burke” (102). This argument has been contested by authors such as Johnson, who states that it denies Austen an “active participation in the war of ideas” (12). Johnson also emphasises the various ways in which Austen’s work parodies conduct books and distances itself from the values advocated in them. We know Austen was well informed about such publications, since authors like More, West, Edgeworth and Gisborne are mentioned at several points in her letters. However, in contrast to these two points of view, I will present Austen as an author who neither distances her work completely from the values of conduct books nor intends it to fulfil a didactic function. Indeed, the set of values comprised in oeconomy, such as frugality, utility, social responsibility and ability for self-management, are presented as laudable in the novels. When a woman is portrayed as a good household manager in Austen, she usually possesses all of these qualities or acquires them throughout the novel. Nevertheless, Austen’s engagement with qualities surrounding female management is more complex than the direct prescription of certain values.

This complexity is, to some extent, explained by Nachumi: “As Margaret Kirkham contends, Austen was an enlightenment feminist, someone who firmly believed in women’s ability to reason. Her primary interest is in establishing women’s agency, both as spectators and as readers” (238). Writing specifically about *Mansfield Park*, Nachumi argues that this novel “encourages its readers – regardless of their gender – to experience both a rational and an emotional response to the plays they watch, the novels they read, and the fictions they encounter in their daily lives” (238). As far as questions on female management are concerned, Austen expects the same kind of rational engagement from her readers. Despite Austen’s disagreement with a considerable part of the ideas defended in conduct books and her rejection of their didacticism, her novels are patently influenced by this dialogue on female management. Austen was, therefore, not “given ... old fashioned-notions,” as Butler argues, but motivated by the plethora of works on management to consider this topic

and explore it in her novels, something we have already seen in the previous chapter. As will be demonstrated, rather than employ her novels as fictional conduct books through which to convey straightforward moral lessons, Austen uses them instead as a means through which to problematise questions regarding management. In doing so, she expects her readers to engage critically with her work and the topics it covers in the same way that she does with conduct books.

2.1 Management, conduct and morality

Writing on household management, Harvey draws attention to the distinction between “keeping house” and “housekeeping.” According to Harvey, housekeeping “connoted domestic tasks that serviced the bodily needs of the family,” practical domestic tasks and often food preparation (160). Keeping house integrated “demarcated architectural space and gendered relationships of household management” (160). Despite the two concepts being listed in Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as equivalent to each other, Harvey argues that a similar distinction is necessary between “oeconomy” and “economy,” as it is not sufficient to define “oeconomy” as a more traditional form of the latter (58). As Vickery affirms, “household management was a pressing subject to the Georgians, often discussed in terms of oeconomy,” which derived from *Oeconomicus*, by the Greek writer Xenophon (*Behind Closed Doors* 296). Harvey explains that oeconomy was “the practice of managing the economic and moral resources of the household for the maintenance of good order,” combining “day-to-day management (housekeeping or domestic economy) and the macro or global management of people and resources (governance or domestic patriarchy)” (22). Whereas economy would stand for “frugality” and “disposition of things,” as stated in Johnson’s *Dictionary*, oeconomy could be “taken in a more extensive sense, for a just, prudent, and regular conduct in all the parts of life” (22).

Harvey thus equates domestic economy with housekeeping, describing it simply as practical domestic tasks, such as the preparation of food. I propose to use the term in a broader sense, encompassing not just the application of the principle of frugality in these practical every-day tasks, but also the idea of social responsibility and usefulness. In the conduct book that she co-authored with her father, *Essays on Practical Education* (1815), Edgeworth put forward an idea of economy that incorporated both

of these aspects: “When we recommend economy and prudence to our pupils, we must at the same time keep their hearts open to the pleasures of generosity; economy and prudence will put it in the power of the generous to give” (1: 33).¹⁴ In *Cottage Economy* (1822), William Cobbett agrees with this sentiment by opposing the use of economy as a synonym for avarice: “the word Economy, like a great many others, has, in its application, been very much abused. It is generally used as if it meant parsimony, stinginess” (3). The concept of usefulness is, in this context, also an important one. Indeed, through her role, a household manager contributes with work that benefits both the family and, through socially conscientious practices, the rest of the community. However, there is more to the notion of household management than this concept of domestic economy. Johnson’s *Dictionary*, for instance, defines “manage,” “management” and “managery” as “conduct, frugality.” Conduct, on the one hand, is defined as a name as “behaviour, economy,” and as a verb as “to guide, manage, to order.” Albeit concise, this definition encapsulates both the practical and the moral aspect of the role of the household manager. Good management is, therefore, directly related to the bipartite idea of oeconomy Harvey presents in her work: the management of both the economic and the moral resources of the household.

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, by the time Austen was writing her novels conduct books directed specifically at women had become well-established and exceedingly popular. In *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel* Skinner calls attention to an important pattern which characterised the conduct book literature on management: “‘economy’ was something regularly recommended in such books, whether they were addressed to women or men. For women, however, effective management was strictly confined to the household” (6). And, indeed, the anonymous author of *Domestic Management, or, the Art of Conducting a Family*, presumably published in the 1800s, states that: “It being the department of the master of the family to provide for it, it devolves to the mistress to make the provision allowed go as far as it can” (4-5). Management, therefore, is represented as one of the few possible forms of access to

¹⁴ Maria Edgeworth authored all of the sections of *Essays on Practical Education* cited in this thesis, as indicated in the introduction of the conduct book: “The work was resumed from a design formed and begun twenty years ago, by Mr. Richard Lovell Edgeworth; all that relates to the art of teaching to read in the chapter on Tasks, the chapter on Grammar and Classic Literature, Geography, Chronology, Arithmetic, Geometry and Mechanics, were written by him. The sketch of an Introduction to Chemistry was written by his son Lovell E. and the rest of the book by his daughter Maria E.” (1: ix-x).

property for women, whereas for men it is one of the many. Unsurprisingly, the level of responsibility derived from management is not underestimated in conduct books. This is illustrated by Mrs. Taylor's *Practical Hints to Young Females, on the Duties of a Wife, a Mother, and a Mistress of a Family* (1815), which argues that a man's prosperity depends not only on his own agency but also on the woman's responsible management:

There are few husbands so adroit in the management of their incomes as to be entirely able to defend them from dissipation, where ignorance and extravagance are the characteristics of the wife. Vain too are his labours to accumulate, if she cannot, or will not, expend with discretion. Vain too are his expectations of happiness, if economy, order, and regularity are not to be found at home: and the woman who has not feeling and principle sufficient to regulate her conduct in these concerns, will rarely acquit herself respectably in the more elevated parts of female duty. (17-18)

This text thus presents the role of the female manager as one that is complementary to that of the male manager. This should not surprise us since, as Harvey explains, although the prevalent system in this period was a patriarchal one, it "[accommodated] the exercise of often considerable authority on the part of women in the interests of the shared household unit. Women's agency in the household was entirely compatible with the central tenet of the discourse of oeconomy that men had ultimate control over goods and property" (78). The master of the house ultimately held legal control over the property, but it does not follow that a woman was constrained to a limited and submissive role in the household. As indicated by the excerpt from Taylor's conduct book, the role of female manager would encompass the exercise of economic and financial rectitude, which was dependent on her capacity for self-restraint. This last aspect, according to Armstrong, meant that a woman "had to lack the competitive desires and worldly ambitions that consequently belonged – as if by some natural principle – to the male" (59). Consequently, the female manager's responsible and morally sound conduct, combined with her ability to put her own personal interests and desires aside, was essential for the economic, financial and social prosperity of the family.

By bestowing importance on a woman's ability to self-regulate, which would subsequently allow her to regulate those around her and manage the household

successfully, conduct book authors established a link between good household management and a woman's self-management. In doing so, these authors also placed themselves strongly in opposition to ideas on female education which encouraged the display of women's bodies, "a carry-over from the Renaissance display of aristocratic power" (75), and recommended "a whole new set of economic practices that directly countered what were supposed to be seen as the excesses of a decadent aristocracy" (73). This is consistent with contemporary ideas of the middle class as a "bastion of moderation and temperance" (53), "not vitiated by luxury on the one hand, and not depressed by poverty on the other" (Wahrman 147). According to these works, the objectification resulting from that previous model of female excellence robbed women of the subjectivity and the ability to step outside of themselves, on which the successful management of the household and supervision of those dependent on them relied. As Armstrong affirms, such a woman could not be "'seen' and still be vigilant" (75).

This objectification of women was an aspect of the current system of female education severely criticised by virtually every single conduct book author, regardless of political affiliation, from Wollstonecraft to more conservative authors such as More. Talia Schaffer argues that by the beginning of the nineteenth century domestic activities such as handicrafts stopped being associated with "aristocratic leisure" and instead "signified the moral, managerial virtues of the bourgeoisie," as well as what was seen as a distinctly middle-class "thrifty, skilful mode of domestic management" (33). However, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conduct books demonstrate that these ideas originated much earlier. Indeed, the authors of such conduct books began to criticise the previous model of female excellence, regarding it as a threat to a woman's responsible performance of her role as household manager. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), for example, Wollstonecraft criticises the way in which a system of female education too focused on accomplishments such as needlework "contracts [women's] faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, by confining their thoughts to their persons" (147). In *The Parental Monitor* (1788) Mrs. Bonhote declares that "a young girl, vain of her beauty, and whose chief study and employment is the decoration of her person, is a most contemptible character" (125). According to Bonhote, this vanity and constant search for admiration would have perilous consequences for the entire family: "Few men would venture to marry a woman whose taste and inclination would lead her to spend double the income of her portion in the decoration of her person" (104). In order to guarantee

the economic and financial prosperity of the household, therefore, a woman would have to be able to keep her own desires and interests under control.

Conduct book literature also emphasises the idea that a female manager would have to be capable not only of successfully regulating the practical aspects of household management but also of establishing order and supervising others. This last aspect of her role was equally dependent on her capacity for self-management, as well as good conduct. Such an interdependence inevitably creates a link between the morality of the mistress and the state of the household under her management. This is in accordance with Michael McKeon's argument that "the public regulation of both morals and finances was internalised in the domestic and private role of wife and mother" (181). Thus during the Georgian period the responsibility for creating a domestic space of order and harmony became part of the role attributed to the female manager. Margaret Ponsonby has also argued that "The house was increasingly expected to be a haven of domesticity: in particular it should be the woman's role to create a home for her family" (13). This argument resulted in the condition of the morals of the family, and the presence or absence of order within the household, becoming directly associated with the virtue of its female manager. Vickery corroborates this idea by explaining that "A powerful correlation was already forged between household neatness and modesty in women ... The wholesomeness of the interior was a demonstration of the virtues of the wife" (*Behind Closed Doors* 296).

By the end of the eighteenth century this correlation had become well established. This is corroborated by Lewis, who has demonstrated that the domestic space was conceived as female in correspondence of the period: "guests went to Lady Jersey's or Lady Palmerston's, even if their lordships were physically present. The Duchess of Devonshire even went so far as to record in her diary for 1788 that she "saw Sheridan at Mrs. Sheridan's" (100). Certain texts went as far as to connect the state of the household with the physical body of its female manager. In fact, Harvey mentions a diary entry of an anonymous man living in Bath in 1769 recounting a dream by his father, who disagreed with his choice of bride. The nightmare directly links the female body with the disorder and immorality in the house. As the woman is described as grotesque, with "cheeks sunk in, her countenance pale, her head and other parts quite sluttish," the father in the dream is informed that the corpse of "the old man," presumably her father, was taken as payment for their debts, due to "bad management," and a consequence of there being no "oeconomy in the house" (68).

The revolting nature of the body of the mistress of the house is, therefore, presented as reflective of the poor morals behind the ineffective management that has caused the family's difficulties.

Conduct books also demonstrate the consequences of the establishment of this association between the household and the female manager by presenting good management as something that is essential for the maintenance of the morality and economic and financial prosperity of the household, moral disintegration and ruin following when it is neglected. For example, some connect the unsatisfactory work of the servants and the subsequent lack of order in a household with the manager's ability to provide them with an example of good conduct. The anonymous author of *Domestic Management* justifies their contribution to literature on conduct and household management by presenting their work as "pages ... not hastily thrown together, but ... the result of a whole life of experience" (4). While arguing in favour of the importance of carefully overseeing the work of the servants, the author reinforces their argument through the use of an anecdote:

I asked a cook once, who had lived some years in my place, how she could think of sending up her dinner so ill-dressed, when (having lived with me) I knew she was capable of dressing it better? Her answer was, that she had no satisfaction in taking pains to dress a dinner well, for her mistress had neither smell nor taste. If, therefore, I see a dinner ill-dressed, a room full of littler, or the candles out crooked into the candlesticks, I always conclude that the mistress of that house is indolent and slovenly, and has neither eyes, smell, nor taste. (8-9)

Through this example, the author presents a disorderly and inelegant house, with a substandard appearance, as the consequence of the manager's lack of competence. The use of the word "indolent" to describe a mistress that does not succeed in establishing order within her house echoes the criticism of the previous model of female excellence, which legitimised what the anonymous author of *The Management of the Tongue* (1706), also a conduct book, describes as the "soft, easy and idle life" of women (161). By attributing failure in management partially to idleness, the author of *Domestic Management* places emphasis on the concept of usefulness and the necessity of contributing to the welfare of the family and the smooth running of the household with a reasonable amount of work. A correlation is thus established between physical signs

of disarray in a house (“room full of litter,” “candles out crooked into the candlesticks”) and the morality of its inefficient mistress, mirrored by her body, which the author describes as untidy and possibly even dirty (“slovenly”).

According to this discourse, a female manager’s ability to suitably supervise those reliant on her depends on her own ability for self-management and good conduct. As Trusler affirms: “Good mistresses make good servants; and, on the contrary, bad mistresses will make bad servants” (8). This idea is also expressed by More, who argues that “she who has the best regulated mind will have the best regulated family. As in the superintendence of the universe, wisdom is seen in its effects” (3-4). When looking for an explanation for disorder and moral disintegration in a household, More argues, one would only need to look at its mistress. In his own conduct book, Ellis establishes the same parallel between effective household management and female self-management. Paraphrasing and supporting ideas of another author who remains unnamed throughout the book, Ellis criticises what he sees as women’s lack of self-control over their consumerist desires: “the Dames of our Days, who ... consume their Substance in foolish Expenses, rather than conserve it by wise Oeconomy” (ix). According to him, this distracts female managers from their responsibility of educating their children and supervising those around them: “who have no concern on them of bringing up their Children in Piety, not to keep their Servants in their Duty; who take no Account of what passes in their Family” (ix). This criticism is subsequently followed by Ellis’s description of his model for female excellence:

This was not the Life of that generous Woman who was the Model of her Sex ... she knew all the Secrets of Oeconomy and Government; there was nothing better managed than her House, nor nothing better regulated than her Person; she had a very great Care in the Education of her Children, and of the Fidelity of her Servants ... she had no Poor about her that escaped her knowledge and her Charity. (ix)

Ellis’ choice of words echoes More’s, through which he also argues that the ability for self-management is a requirement for a capable mistress of a house. In addition, his statement emphasises the importance of other aspects of the role of female manager, particularly the duty of providing her children, her servants and the poorest of her community with a sound moral example.

The education of her children is, in fact, one of the most important aspects of the duty of managing the moral resources of the household that was attributed to the female manager. While several works place great emphasis on this topic – such as Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and More’s *Strictures* – Maria and Richard Edgeworth’s *Essays on Practical Education* is particularly interesting, as it broaches this subject in its self-justification. This work begins with an introduction, written by Richard Edgeworth, in which he attributes the authorship of the greatest portion of the book to his daughter, explaining that she was inspired to write about education by the example of her mother. He also ascribes the ideas for one chapter to Edgeworth’s own mother, legitimising her authority in the subject by mentioning her success in the moral education of her children, which he terms “management”:

She was encouraged and enabled to write upon this important subject, by having for many years before her eyes the conduct of a judicious mother in the education of a large family. The chapter on Obedience was written from the late Mrs. Edgeworth’s notes, and was exemplified by her successful practice in the management of her children. (1: x)

Edgeworth’s mother is thus described as a good manager, who not only shared knowledge on household management with her daughter but also provided her with a sound moral example.

Other sections of *Essays on Practical Education* place emphasis on the importance of the provision of this moral example and the ways in which it can impact the personal development of the children:

If children hear their parents express violent admiration for riches, rank, power, or fame, they catch a series of enthusiasm for these things, before they can estimate justly their value ... Children who live with persons of good sense learn to separate the ideas of happiness and a coach and six; but young people who see their fathers, mothers, and preceptors, all smitten with sudden admiration at the sight of a fine phaeton, or a fine gentleman, are immediately infected with the same absurd enthusiasm. (1: 308)

Edgeworth thus argues that the kind of person a child will become is dependent on the moral example with which it is provided. Thus, if a child is raised in a household where extravagance is rife and material possessions and public acclaim are highly esteemed, the likelihood it will value such things is great. This relates to the idea of self-management, in the sense that it requires the female manager to self-manage her more frivolous or misguided desires in order to provide the children with a solid moral example. Nevertheless, interestingly, Edgeworth extends the responsibility to both parents, rather than just to the mother. Instead of attributing the entirety of the responsibility for the children's moral development to the female manager, therefore, Edgeworth recommends that it should be shared between the parents. This, as we will see, is also Austen's own view on household management.

2.2 Surrogate Managers

In *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* Austen approaches the topic of female management through a common trope in the plot: in both novels a female character attempts to appropriate the position of household manager from the legitimate manager, in spite of the fact that there is no possibility that they will ever own the property in question. Legitimacy is not portrayed as being related to legal ownership of property, since the legitimate managers lack this as much as the illegitimate ones. Instead, a manager is considered legitimate by the other characters if he or she possesses a close familial tie to the legal owner. Consequently, the wife or the daughter of the owner is regarded as having a legitimate claim to the role of manager, whereas anyone with a less direct link is considered as lacking in it. In *Mansfield Park* this character is Mrs. Norris, and in *Persuasion* it is Mrs. Clay. Both characters insinuate themselves into the family through similar manoeuvres. Mrs. Clay's justification for visiting Kellynch is her health, "nothing being of so much use to Mrs. Clay's health as a drive to Kellynch" (21). Mrs. Norris, on the other hand, claims to be anxious for Sir Thomas's safety: "she could not help feeling dreadful presentiments, and as the long evenings of autumn came on, was so terribly haunted by these ideas, in the sad solitariness of her cottage, as to be obliged to take daily refuge in the dining room of the park" (30). Fraught with irony, these sentences present the two characters as cunning and self-serving, placing their

motivations in direct opposition to the disinterestedness and self-restraint commended in conduct books.

Appropriating the position of manager, however, is not an easy task. The attempts of both Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Clay are possible only because of vulnerability at the heart of the household. Indeed, Austen's portrayal of the legitimate managers also appears to follow didactic lines, as their performance of the role is presented as being antithetical to the paragon of domestic management put forward by the conduct books. In *Mansfield Park* Lady Bertram, who from the very first pages of the novel is described as wholly indolent, has entirely given up her role as the manager of the household. Extremely superficial, her domestic activities around Mansfield Park are characterised by a lack of usefulness, as her time is said to be spent "sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty" (16). Her complete ignorance of her duties as manager is further expressed by her declaration, upon Sir Thomas's return from Antigua, that "her own time had been irreproachably spent during his absence; she had done a great deal of carpet work and made many yards of fringe" (140). Concerned solely with her physical appearance and refusing to do any useful work, this character thus represents the former aristocratic mode of female excellence criticised by authors such as Wollstonecraft and Bonhote. Focused only on being "seen," Lady Bertram lacks the ability to supervise those around her and, consequently, to ensure the smooth running of the household.

Throughout the novel this character is shown to be failing in the management of both the economic and the moral resources of her household. Her sister, Mrs. Norris, is aware of the possibility of the family facing a decrease in their economic and financial prosperity in the future: "Why, you know Sir Thomas's means will be rather strained, if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns" (24). Contrastingly, Lady Bertram possesses such a limited knowledge of household management that she remains blissfully oblivious to any potential complications: "Oh! that will soon be settled. Sir Thomas has been writing about it, I know" (24). As indicated in Taylor's conduct book, a woman's unawareness of the family's economic situation would prevent her from successfully managing her household. This ignorance in Lady Bertram also prevents her from establishing a companionate relationship with her husband based on mutual support. Owing to his wife's lack of knowledge in household management, Sir Thomas is left to manage the economic affairs of the family without his wife's advice or moral support.

Lady Bertram is also presented as an unsatisfactory educator and moral guide to her children, who does not dedicate any of her time to the supervision of their education: “To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had no time for such cares” (24). Duckworth also remarks on this indifferent attitude and argues that it is demonstrative of Lady Bertram’s “withdrawal from any sense of personal responsibility for the behaviour of her children – just as her exaggerated concern for her lap dog Pug testifies to the displacement of her ethical duty” (60). Her characterisation thus matches Ellis’s depiction of an incapable manager, as she takes “no Account of what passes in [her] family” (ix). More specifically, Lady Bertram’s neglect of both the economic and the moral aspects of household management is evidence of her relinquishment of the role of manager, which was legitimately hers. Having given up her responsibilities, she leaves her household vulnerable to Mrs. Norris’s ambitions and control.

Likewise, at the beginning of *Persuasion*, the rightful manager of Kellynch Hall has given up her responsibilities. As the oldest daughter of a widowed father, the role of manager legitimately belongs to Elizabeth. Even though her father, as the owner of the property, has the power to limit the extent of her influence in the management of the household, Austen offers no indication that he does so. *Persuasion* opens with a description of Elizabeth’s failure in the performance of the role of manager. In its first few pages we are informed that the Elliot family is in financial difficulty, something that had previously been prevented by the exemplary economic management of the late Lady Elliot. “While Lady Elliot lived, there had been method, moderation, and economy,” Austen writes, thus characterising Lady Elliot as someone with knowledge of domestic economy (14). Indeed, this description echoes that of the paragon of domestic management put forward by Taylor in her conduct book, who would undertake the establishment of “economy, order, and regularity” in the household (18). The description of Elizabeth’s management contrasts significantly with her mother’s, as her “laying down of the domestic law at home” consists in the exhibition of external signs of rank and wealth: “For thirteen years she had been doing the honours ... and leading the way out of the chaise and four ... Thirteen winters’ revolving frosts had seen her opening every ball of credit” (12). Even though it is precisely this extravagance that places the family in financial strain, Elizabeth remains fully unaware of the situation, which reveals a lack of knowledge in economy. When she is informed by her father of the real state of their financial affairs, she, like him, rejects any accountability

for it: “she felt herself ill-used and unfortunate, as did her father” (14). Instead of presenting the establishment of these principles as the sole responsibility of Elizabeth, Austen describes the collapse of the family’s finances as the consequence of the mismanagement of both the male and the female managers of the household.

The management of the household, at which both the legitimate managers of Kellynch and Mansfield Park fail, is an undertaking that, as the previous chapter illustrated, must combine maintenance as well as improvement. The managers of both Kellynch and Mansfield Park fail to do this, thus allowing for the infiltration of the prospective surrogate managers into the household. The position of manager in Mansfield Park consequently becomes available and is taken up by Lady Bertram’s sister, Mrs. Norris. At the opening of the novel Austen explains the reason behind the discrepancy in the situations of the two sisters through the use of irony. Despite having been in her youth “quite as handsome as her sister,” Mrs. Norris fails to make as good a match because “there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them” (3). Consequently, Mrs. Norris is “obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune” (3). Austen’s irony in both instances conveys the lack of opportunities available to genteel women for securing a comfortable financial situation for themselves, thereby presenting Mrs. Norris’s decision as understandable. Subsequent descriptions of Mrs. Norris during her marriage and then widowhood, however, place emphasis on her morally reprehensible behaviour. Indeed, Austen indicates that, having married into a lower income and standing in society than she hoped for, her frustration with the disappointment of her expectations and jealousy of her sister’s superior position in society make her miserly and rapacious. Lane affirms that, as the widow of a clergyman Mrs. Norris would find herself “without a public role or social standing” (79), something she refuses to accept. She therefore takes on the role of Maria and Julia’s surrogate mother, accompanying her nieces to social events from which Lady Bertram takes no pleasure: “Lady Bertram did not go into public with her daughters. She was too indolent even to accept a mother’s gratification in witnessing their success ... the charge was made over to her sister, who desired nothing better than a post of such honourable representation” (27). Lady Bertram thus gives up her social and moral responsibilities to Mrs. Norris, who is thereby granted a higher social status than the one she would have as a clergyman’s widow. She is also allowed to mix with people of higher social positions and to collect all the rewards that come with it.

Intent on having her nieces marry well, the result of which would be considerably more privileges for herself, Mrs. Norris also takes up her time “promoting gaieties for her nieces and looking around for their future husbands” (27). Described as having “no real affection for her sister” (7) Mrs. Norris’s interest in the concerns of her nieces can also be seen as stemming not from real love for them, but from the hope that she will have something to gain from their advantageous marriages. As such, she is presented as lacking the ability to put her personal desires aside in order to supervise the young people in the household successfully.

While in *Mansfield Park* it is clearly her sister’s role Mrs. Norris is trying to take for herself, the question of whose role Mrs. Clay wishes to appropriate in *Persuasion* is more complex. Lady Russell’s first expression of distaste for Mrs. Clay, for instance, stems from her belief that she is attempting to steal the role of secondary manager from Anne: “Mrs. Clay engaged to go ... as a most important and valuable assistant to the latter [Elizabeth] in all the business before her” (32). To Lady Russell this constitutes a usurpation of a role that is not legitimately hers and an “affront ... to Anne” (32). Lady Russell also sees the prospective marriage between Sir Walter Elliot and Mrs. Clay as the appropriation of a role that she believes to be rightfully Anne’s, as she wishes to see her as the future mistress of Kellynch. Anne, on the other hand, is baffled by Elizabeth’s acceptance of Mrs. Clay into their household since, in the case of a marriage between Mrs. Clay and Sir Walter, Elizabeth would lose her role as manager and be “in the event of such a reverse ... so much more to be pitied than herself” (33). This also constitutes another indication that other characters consider Elizabeth’s involvement in the management of the household to be considerable.

A feature shared by Mrs. Clay and Mrs. Norris is that the language associated with both characters is connected to the idea of threat, danger and invasion. This is despite the fact that, whereas Mrs. Norris actively attempts to manage Mansfield Park, Mrs. Clay never has the opportunity to do the same with Sir Walter’s household, and only presents the possibility that she might manage it in the future. In *Persuasion* this sort of language is particularly linked to Mrs. Clay whenever the thoughts of Lady Russell, Anne and Mr. Elliot about her are expressed through free indirect speech. Anne first describes the intimacy between Mrs. Clay and her father and sister as something that could bring “results the most serious” to the family (33). Anne is also suspicious of her “Acute mind and assiduous pleasing manners,” which she considers to be “dangerous attractions” that leave her “so impressed by the degree of their

danger” (33). Lady Russell’s thoughts express this same sense of threat, as she regards the increasing closeness between Mrs. Clay and the Elliot family as an infestation, describing it as “the plague of Mrs. Clay” (119). The sense of threat is again adopted in Mrs. Smith’s description of Mr. Elliot’s resolution to re-establish a relationship with Sir Walter, in order to attempt to prevent a marriage between him and Mrs. Clay: “the resolution of coming to Bath as soon as possible ... with the view of ... recovering such a footing in the family, as might give him the means of ascertaining the degree of his danger, and of circumventing the lady if he found it material” (166). This strong language, depicting Mrs. Clay as a menace that must be subjugated, is mirrored by Anne’s thoughts, who, “pleased with him [Mr. Elliot] for not liking Mrs. Clay,” begins to regard him as an ally in the goal of “defeating her [Mrs. Clay]” (123).

The presence of such negative language associated with Mrs. Clay illustrates the illegitimate nature that these characters attribute to her ambitions of marrying Sir Walter and becoming mistress of Kellynch. Lady Russell’s distaste for Mrs. Clay originates in her belief that Anne is the legitimate successor of her old friend Lady Elliot as mistress of Kellynch. Even though Anne reacts with the same suspicion towards Mrs. Clay because she sees her as attempting to steal Elizabeth’s role in the household, the truth is that she is just as reluctant as Lady Russell to accept her as her mother’s successor. Furthermore, Anne’s attachment towards Kellynch also makes the idea of one day becoming its mistress attractive to her, which constitutes a further reason for her contempt towards Mrs. Clay. Mr. Elliot, on the other hand, feels threatened by Mrs. Clay, since her marriage to Sir Walter could potentially result in a male heir, which would prevent him from inheriting Kellynch and receiving the title that comes with its ownership.

Language connecting a prospective surrogate manager to a sense of threat and danger is also present in *Mansfield Park*. Towards the end of the novel Fanny reflects on Mrs. Norris’s share in the moral disintegration of the family at Mansfield Park, using the word “evil” to characterise her: “the still greater evil of a restless, officious companion, too apt to be heightening danger in order to enhance her own importance” (339). The same applies to Sir Thomas, who, upon Mrs. Norris’s decision to leave Mansfield Park, considers her former presence in his household as an “evil” (365). Whereas Fanny is incapable of feeling affection towards Mrs. Norris owing to the neglectful and even cruel way in which she treats her, Sir Thomas is also biased towards her, since he considers her to be, to a certain extent, responsible for the moral

transgressions committed by his daughters. Just as in *Persuasion*, the language related to a sense of threat is adopted by characters who are prejudiced, for whichever reason, against the surrogate managers.

While these negative feelings of other characters towards Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Clay are comparable, the sympathy from the narrator is arguably dissimilar. Indeed, while the narrative does emphasise Mrs. Clay's cunning and self-serving nature, the narrator presents the motivation behind her wish to marry Sir Walter as understandable. As a widow with two children, who has found herself living once again in a state of dependency in her father's house, Mrs. Clay's situation is pitiable. Her discontentment with her dependent state, therefore, makes her egotistical motives seem more excusable. Austen also suggests a complexity to Mrs. Clay of which characters biased against her seem to be unaware:

Anne admired the good acting of the friend [Mrs. Clay], in being able to show such pleasure as she did, in the expectation, and in the actual arrival of the very person whose presence must really be interfering with her prime object. It was impossible but that Mrs. Clay must hate the sight of Mr. Elliot; and yet she could assume a most obliging, placid look, and appear quite satisfied with the curtailed license of devoting herself only half as much to Sir Walter as she would have done otherwise. (172)

Through free indirect speech, Austen expresses Anne's harsh judgement about Mrs. Clay, a consequence of her lack of awareness of the latter's true motivations. Indeed, what Anne does not know at this point in the narrative is that Mrs. Clay is genuinely happy at the prospect of meeting Mr. Elliot. The irony is in Anne's belief that Mrs. Clay is slyer than she really is and her consequent assumption that her behaviour is "acting." In this instance Mrs. Clay is not being calculating and reserved but acting out of a genuine affection for Mr. Elliot, which causes her to abandon her previous plan of marrying Sir Walter. Therefore, it is not the narrator's characterisation that presents Mrs. Clay as a calculating person at this point in the narrative, but Anne's biased and misinformed opinion of her.

Mrs. Norris, on the other hand, can be said to receive less sympathy from the narrator. Whereas Mrs. Clay's situation in society is patently precarious, with £600 a year and no one to support, Mrs. Norris could lead a comfortable, independent life,

without placing herself in a situation of dependence towards her sister and brother-in-law, if only she were not so unwilling to accept her comparatively lower status in society. It is precisely this refusal that leads her to attempt to seize her sister's role as manager of Mansfield Park. Frustrated with her lower status, Fanny becomes the target, John Wiltshire affirms, of "the worthlessness, inferiority and indebtedness" that Mrs. Norris "is so anxious to deny in herself" (92). Fanny is therefore "humiliated and punished ... scolded and victimised ... so that Mrs. Norris can momentarily appease her own sense of functionless dependence, and reaffirm the strictness of the social hierarchy which gives meaning to her life" (92). The role of nurse to the servants that Mrs. Norris adopts is, equally, "a traditional role for the genteel but otherwise disempowered woman" (91). Through this "benevolence intricate with (and sometimes masking) coercion," Mrs. Norris "punishes others for her own dependency and frustration, whilst being able to hide this from herself in the guise of generosity to the recipients and loyal service to the system" (91). By adopting this role, therefore, Mrs. Norris desperately attempts to hang on to a stratified system of hierarchy in which her position is still comparatively high. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, by indicating in the first page of the novel that Mrs. Norris "found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris" (3) for lack of a wealthier suitor, Austen indicates that the influence and financial comfort she is seeking are not things that would be accessible to her in any other way.

The dishonesty that characterises Mrs. Norris's actions, which contribute to her unfavourable portrayal, bear a resemblance to those of the wife of Sir Murtagh, the landowner of the large estate in Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. This novel, published in 1800 but set before the Constitution of 1782, traces the events at the Rackrent estate as it is inherited over four different generations of heirs, the second of which is the litigious Sir Murtagh Rackrent. The novel is written from the point of view of the steward, Thady Quirk, and it concludes with his son's inheritance of the estate. Mrs. Norris's behaviour mirrors the miserliness of Sir Murtagh's wife, as well as the way in which she psychologically manipulates people of lower classes in society into offering her material concessions:

With these ways of managing, 'tis surprising how cheap my lady got things done, and how proud she was of it. Her table the same way – kept for next to nothing – duty fowls, and duty turkeys, and duty geese, came as fast we could eat 'em,

for my lady kept a sharp look out, and knew to a tub of butter every thing the tenants had, all around. They knew her way, and that with fear of driving for rent and Sir Murtagh's law-suits, they were kept in such good order, they never thought of coming near Castle Rackrent without a present or something or other. (14)

Lady Murtagh's accumulation of gifts from her tenants, therefore, resembles in certain aspects Mrs. Norris collection of similar items from the servants when she visits Mr. Rushworth's estate, such as a "little heath," cheeses, and pheasant's eggs (84). In the same way that Mrs. Norris keeps a close observation of the servants at Mansfield Park, Lady Murtagh is described as permanently "looking close to every thing" (13). Moreover, Lady Murtagh disguises actions which are ultimately financially profitable for her and reinforce her superior status as charitable acts: "However, my lady was very charitable in her own way. She had a charity school for poor children, where they were taught to read and write gratis, and where they were kept well to spinning gratis for my lady in return" (13). A similar relationship to the one between Lady Murtagh and the children, where claims of generosity are used in an attempt to mask exploitation, is established between Mrs. Norris and Fanny. In fact, Mrs. Norris also forces Fanny to work for her, whilst demanding her gratitude. This constitutes one of the instances in which Mrs. Norris behaves as if she possessed the same standing as her sister and her husband within the family and in society, and not the significantly lower one of a clergyman's widow. Mrs. Norris thus interprets the offer of social favours to Fanny as a civility not just towards her sister and her husband but also towards herself, claiming her niece's gratitude: "Nor must you be fancying, that the invitation is meant as any particular compliment to you; the compliment is intended to your uncle and aunt, and me. Mrs. Grant thinks it a civility due to us to take a little notice of you" (172). The lack of self-consciousness that Mrs. Norris reveals in her belief that such attentions are "due" to her, a clergyman's widow, but not to her niece, is portrayed by Austen as ironic. Episodes such as this establish a significant difference between Lady Murtagh and Mrs. Norris: whereas as the mistress of a large estate Lady Murtagh has significant power, through which she can instill "fear of driving for rent and Sir Murtagh's law-suits" in her tenants, the narrator increasingly emphasises Mrs. Norris's powerlessness.

Throughout the novel Mrs. Norris attempts to present herself as someone whose contributions to the household are representative of a “thrifty, skillful mode of domestic management” (Schaffer 33), and in direct opposition to her sister’s inertia. Despite this, she constantly expects to be complimented for useless managerial work and even for work that she does not actually do. For instance, one of the things Mrs. Norris boasts about the most is her resourcefulness and the benefits it brings to Mansfield Park: “I am of some use I hope in preventing waste and making the most of things” (112). She also permanently calls attention to her supposed self-sacrifice: “much exertion and many sacrifices to glance at in the form of hurried walks and sudden removals from her own fireside, and many excellent hints of distrust and economy to Lady Bertram and Edmund to detail, whereby a most considerable saving had always arisen” (147). However, even if anything is saved, such as the green baize for the curtain in the theatricals, Mrs. Norris keeps it for herself. Even in her own house, money is saved to no benefit. In spite of her boast that she and her late husband did “a vast deal” of improvements at the parsonage, the only one she mentions is the planting of an apricot tree, which was originally a present from Sir Thomas (42). This aspect is particularly significant since, despite her substantial savings, Mrs. Norris does not invest her money in the improvement of her household or introduce any innovations into its management. Through her management her household remains financially sustainable but ultimately static. Furthermore, the only example of the “excellent hints of distrust and economy” she presents is her confrontation with the son of a servant because he allegedly attempted to have a free meal with the other servants. Her unkindness thus contrasts with the paragon of the female manager put forward by Ellis, who nurtures “the fidelity of her servants” (ix). In reality, at no point in the novel does she offer any form of useful advice about saving money, and her antagonistic behaviour towards the servants ultimately brings no benefit to Mansfield Park.

The episode of the theatricals is also illustrative of Austen’s portrayal of Mrs. Norris’s claims to satisfactory household management as unfounded. Indeed, despite offering her help with the organisation so as to be able to supervise her nieces and nephews, she instead supports all of their plans for extravagant expenses. As a moral guide Mrs. Norris is equally unavailing, since she never sees anything objectionable in the behaviour of the young people, from the invitation of a stranger into the house, Mr. Yates, or the flirtatious behaviour between her niece Maria and Henry Crawford.

It soon becomes clear that her motivation behind offering her assistance is not the wish to be useful and contribute towards the welfare of the family, but the egotistical self-gratification from the “hurry, bustle and importance” (102). This egotism is illustrative of the lack of a detached perspective, essential to a successful household management, that both the surrogate managers lack. Too engrossed by her obsession with hoarding money and her ambitions for a higher position in the family and in society in general, Mrs. Norris lacks the ability for self-management that characterises a good household manager. Unable to control her own desires and see beyond herself, she unsurprisingly reveals herself to be incapable of supervising those around her. Unlike Fanny, who, as argued by Nora Nachumi, possesses the ability for self-management that allows her to “see ... the situation quite clearly because she can look beyond her own emotional needs” (241), Mrs. Norris is blind to the eminent consequences of the behaviour of her nieces. This egotism and inability to control one’s desires also characterise Mrs. Clay, who only attempts to become the new mistress of Kellynch to satisfy her own interests.

Whereas in *Persuasion* the reader is simply informed of Mrs. Clay’s increasingly close intimacy with the Elliots, in *Mansfield Park* Mrs. Norris’s attempts at becoming the new manager of her sister’s household are described in detail, as is her ultimate failure to achieve this position. In fact, from the moment of Sir Thomas’s return it becomes progressively more obvious that Mrs. Norris does not do any useful managerial work in *Mansfield Park*:

... she was vexed by the manner of his return. It had left her nothing to do ... Sir Thomas ... had sought no confidant but the butler, and had been following him almost instantaneously into the drawing-room. Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office in which she had always depended, whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded; and was now trying to be in a bustle without having anything to bustle about, and labouring to be important when nothing was wanted but tranquility and silence. (141)

The intimation that Mrs. Norris “had always depended” on a role that is plainly unnecessary shows her at her most vulnerable. Sir Thomas’s decision to seek “no confidant but the butler” indicates that he has employed all the help he requires and that Mrs. Norris’s role in *Mansfield Park* is, in fact, non-existent. The use of the word “bustle” also suggests that the activities in which she engages are void of purpose.

Mrs. Norris is even more humbled during the preparations for the ball at Mansfield Park. Firstly, she feels “surprise and vexation [which] required some minutes silence to be settled into composure” when Sir Thomas decides to organise a ball in honour of Fanny and William, despite Mrs. Norris’s opposition to this idea (198). Mrs. Norris subsequently consoles herself with the thought that the management of the event will be handed over to her: “His daughters absent and herself not consulted! There was comfort, however, soon at hand. She must be the doer of everything. Lady Bertram would of course be spared all thought and exertion, and it would all fall upon her. She would have to do the honours of the evening” (198). However, Mrs. Norris soon finds that her suggestions are not necessary, as Sir Thomas has already made all of the decisions with regards to the ball himself. Sir Thomas thus gives Mrs. Norris a clear indication of his refusal to legitimise her appropriation of her sister’s role. The use of the word “consulted” also represents Mrs. Norris’s unrealistic expectation that Sir Thomas would treat her as if she were his wife and the mistress of the house.

Mrs. Norris’s failure to establish herself as the manager of Mansfield Park and her increasing powerlessness also demonstrate the precarious nature of this role and form of relationship towards property. Indeed, in attempting to supervise a house whose owner is only her brother-in-law rather than her husband, Mrs. Norris places herself in a situation in which the family can dismiss her if she is deemed unnecessary. Maria’s scandalous elopement is Mrs. Norris’s final disappointment in her attempt to appropriate the role of manager, as one of her prized achievements was the matchmaking of Maria and Mr. Rushworth. After she is informed of the elopement, she is completely defeated: “She was an altered creature, quieted, stupefied, indifferent to every thing that passed” (351). Johnson argues that at this point in the novel Mrs. Norris is sent away from Mansfield Park as a way of preventing Sir Thomas from coming to terms with his share of accountability for the moral disintegration of his family: Mrs. Norris’s “banishment relieves [Sir Thomas] ... from the necessity of examining the mutuality of his responsibility in the ruin of his family. The restoration to Sir Thomas of some semblance of moral dignity depends on Mrs. Norris’s eruption into mythical loathsomeness” (115). However, concurrently, Sir Thomas does come to terms with his mistakes in the management of his daughters’ education, such as his attempt to oppose with severity “the excessive indulgence and flattery” of Mrs. Norris and his failure to teach his daughters a “sense of duty” (363) and good moral principles:

“of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them” (364).

It is also worth emphasising that, in contrast to Nachumi’s declaration that these “‘bad’ characters are expelled from Mansfield Park by the end of the novel” (247), in reality Mrs. Norris is never actually asked to leave Mansfield Park. She is also not, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare, “punished and driven from Mansfield Park” due to Sir Thomas’s wish to “rid himself of the one person who has managed to assert herself against his wishes, to evade his control” (171). In fact, not only is Mrs. Norris not the emancipatory character Gilbert and Gubar make her out to be, but the reason she maintains her position in Mansfield Park for so long is through flattery, and she certainly never opposes Sir Thomas in any way. Her fate at the end of the novel is also more complex than Wendy Anne Lee’s suggestion that it is representative of the idea that “sometimes hostile people cannot be integrated into better society, cannot remain in the family circle” (1008). As Lee herself affirms, a “more deeply unified household of Sir Thomas Bertram would not have been vulnerable to the influence of Aunt Norris” (1008), and by the end of *Mansfield Park* “the conditions that have led to disaster remain firmly in place” (Nachumi 247). Indeed, it was precisely Sir Thomas’s and Lady Bertram’s neglect in the management of their children that allowed Mrs. Norris to step in and attempt to supervise the behaviour of her nieces in the first place. By attributing culpability for the moral degradation of the family to Sir Thomas as well as Lady Bertram, Austen aligns herself with the sentiment that the responsibility for the moral development of the children should be shared by both parents, as argued by Edgeworth and her father. This is not acknowledged, however, by either Fanny or Sir Thomas. Naturally biased against Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas because he does not approve of her attempt to appropriate his wife’s role, and Fanny because of her cruelty towards her, both characters consider Mrs. Norris as a threat and blame her for the moral degradation of the family. Curiously, none of these characters attributes any blame to Lady Bertram, the legitimate manager of Mansfield Park. Having relinquished the position of manager and the moral duties of supervisor of her children’s education so completely, Lady Bertram is not presented by any of the characters as sharing any responsibility for the adverse events. Unlike her sister, Lady Bertram never claimed responsibility for the supervision of her daughters and so, at the end of the novel, it is Mrs. Norris who is blamed for failing in her role as a moral guide. Ironically, this is the moment in the novel in which Mrs. Norris gets what she

has always wanted: to be considered the legitimate surrogate manager of Mansfield Park. Indeed, the assigning of blame to Mrs. Norris for the moral deterioration in the family is the first time in the novel in which the other characters attribute to her the right to act in the role of manager. This legitimisation on the part of the other characters, however, only happens when they need a scapegoat, someone whose management they can blame for the events that have taken place, making this moment in the novel deeply ironic.

Whereas Sir Thomas is absent for a considerable part of the narrative – which constitutes a way for Austen to draw attention to the figure of the surrogate manager – and therefore unable to supervise his daughters, he himself admits that the damage to their moral education to which he contributed had taken place much earlier: “Too late he became aware how unfavourable to the character of any young people must be the ... treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home” (363). Maria’s decision to marry Rushworth because of his wealth and Tom’s extravagance are symptoms of their parents’ inability to raise them without “perverting [the] imagination” with the “violent admiration for riches, rank, power or fame” (1: 308) against which Edgeworth argues in *Essays on Practical Education*. In *Persuasion*, Sir Walter is presented as equally disappointing in the role of father since, like Sir Thomas, he neglected to teach both Elizabeth and Mary that happiness does not lie in external signs of wealth. Elizabeth’s lack of success as a manager in particular can be regarded as a consequence of his failure to teach her the importance of social responsibility, as well as the duties towards the community of which they are part. While unarguably Lady Bertram and Elizabeth are presented as being incapable of maintaining order within the households and consequently failing as managers, both novels indicate that the patriarchs have also neglected important aspects of their own roles. In both novels, therefore, the collapse of the family’s finances and moral standing are presented as consequences of the mismanagement of both the men and women of the household. Additionally, the failure to educate the next generation in the importance of values comprised in the concept of oeconomy, such as frugality and social responsibility, puts the financial viability of the estate at risk, making it unsustainable for future generations.

Ultimately, Mrs. Norris’s departure from Mansfield Park represents not her punishment but a possible reform on her part. In fact, Austen indicates that she makes a conscious decision to leave Mansfield Park and, consequently, to abandon all her

ambitions for a higher position in society and increased prosperity: “It ended in Mrs. Norris resolving to quit Mansfield” (365). In doing so, Mrs. Norris finally appears to embody the values of usefulness and disinterestedness comprised in the notion of oeconomy. Leaving behind the comforts of Mansfield Park, Mrs. Norris decides to “devote herself to her unfortunate Maria” in a “remote and private” place, where she and her niece will be “shut up together with little society” (365). The fact that Mrs. Norris voluntarily chooses a situation characterised by the same isolation she had been trying to escape, in order to support her niece at a trying time, is revealing of a selflessness and disinterestedness that she did not appear to possess before.

Both the legitimate managers in the two novels and Mrs. Norris are portrayed by Austen as failing in this role because they lack the qualities conduct book literature presented as essential to its suitable performance. Mrs. Clay, while not shown engaging in actual economic management, is presented as also lacking the potential to succeed in this role. In doing so, Austen establishes clear moral distinctions between characters in a way that is arguably didactic. In spite of this, the description of Mrs. Norris’s destiny, as well as that of Mrs. Clay, is characterised by inconclusiveness rather than straightforward didacticism. Indeed, there is no simple resolution at the end of *Mansfield Park*, in which Mrs. Norris, the “bad” character is punished and expelled from the family forever. Instead, there is an indication that she is a more complex character, with the ability for improvement and reform. By placing emphasis on this possibility of improvement for Mrs. Norris, Austen goes against the good/bad binary conception of morality so often put forward by straightforwardly didactic novels.

Similarly, in *Persuasion* Mrs. Clay’s complexity as a character is revealed when ultimately her plans fail because her affection for Mr. Elliot overpowers her ambition. After her father rebukes her for choosing to visit someone of such a low position in society as Mrs. Smith instead of their cousins the Darlrymples, Anne, with Mrs. Clay in mind, hopes that he will “recollect, that Mrs. Smith was not the only widow in Bath between thirty and forty, with little to live on, and no surname of dignity” (128). It is worth noting that, by the end of *Persuasion*, Mrs. Smith achieves her happy ending: with the assistance of Wentworth, she acquires a prosperous income from her husband’s property in the West Indies. This is not presented as a reward for her morally irreprehensible behaviour: in the defence of her own interests Mrs. Smith almost risks Anne’s happiness by advising her to marry Mr. Elliot and, at the end, acquires property that is none other than slave plantations. Arguably, Mrs. Smith is

capable of even more morally culpable actions to achieve financial stability than Mrs. Clay is. For this reason, it is interesting that Anne should be so sympathetic towards Mrs. Smith and so wholly unsympathetic towards Mrs. Clay.

An explanation for this would be, as has been argued earlier, that Anne is opposed to Mrs. Clay because she regards her as someone who is attempting to appropriate a role that belongs to her sister, one that Anne desires for herself and that once belonged – and was exemplarily performed – by her mother. The ending of *Persuasion*, however, indicates that, unlike Anne, the narrator feels some sympathy towards Mrs. Clay. Indeed, the final piece of information Austen provides about Mrs. Clay is the following:

Mrs. Clay's affections had overpowered her interest, and she had sacrificed, for the young man's sake, the possibility of scheming longer for Sir Walter. She has abilities, however, as well as affections; and it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William. (201)

In this extract Mrs. Clay is portrayed as someone who, in spite of her genuine “affections,” has not lost her calculating nature (“abilities”), and who is willing to resort to seduction and psychological manipulation (“wheedled and caressed”) to achieve her goals. The novel thus ends with a clear indication that Mrs. Clay may still one day return to Kellynch as its mistress. Instead of Mrs. Clay being punished for her schemes, the possibility that her cunning “may finally carry the day” against that of such a negative character as Mr. Elliot is, if anything, a pleasing possibility. *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* thus end not with a didactic lesson on the characteristics to be desired in a female household manager or with the clear expulsion and punishment of the two characters that have failed as surrogate managers, but with an inconclusiveness that invites the reader's critical engagement.

While property and the way it is administered are always central to Austen's work, her exploration of the possibilities and limitations of the role of surrogate manager reflects her interest in the position of women within a system that restricts their opportunities for property ownership. Through the portrayal of Mrs. Clay and Mrs. Norris, Austen engages with the ongoing dialogue on female management and

the expectations placed on it by society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, both characters are presented as coveting the power and status that come from the role of manager for selfish reasons, while revealing themselves to be reluctant to shoulder its responsibilities. On the one hand, this attitude is antithetical to the values expressed in conduct books, according to which a female manager should regulate her own desire in the execution of her role. More importantly, however, it represents the refusal of the power and responsibility offered to women in this role, which enables them to guarantee the maintenance of the morality, as well as the economic and financial prosperity, of the household. It is not only the surrogate managers who are guilty of this but also the legitimate managers they attempt to replace. By missing this opportunity, these characters establish a sense of ownership towards the property that ultimately does not result in any improvements. On the contrary, their management – or, in Mrs. Clay's case, the possibility of her management – either proves to be nefarious for the household by threatening its stability or results in it remaining stationary. In spite of this, Austen's refusal of didacticism means that Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Clay are not used to express a moral lesson by the end of the novels. Instead, these characters and their attempts at appropriating the role of household manager illustrate the extent to which someone may be willing to go in order to have their feelings of ownership towards property legitimised. Mrs. Norris's and Mrs. Clay's position as disempowered women limits them in such a way that usurping the roles of the legitimate managers is the only alternative they can find for the secluded lives they have been forced to lead. The surrogate managers' willingness to engage in morally reprehensible behaviour can therefore be seen as symptomatic of their awareness of their limited options; their actions are not presented as completely unwarranted, particularly in the case of Mrs. Clay, whose situation is comparatively more precarious. The endings of the two novels also indicate that these characters, although flawed, are not as morally corrupt as the other characters seem to believe them to be. Indeed, easy as it would have been to write thoroughly didactic endings in which the two characters are expelled "into mythical loathsomeness" (Johnson 115), Austen instead punishes neither character for their moral failings. Rather, the reader is acquainted with their motivations to the point that it is possible to understand them, if not, in the case of Mrs. Norris, to sympathise with them. Moreover, not only are these characters not exclusively attributed responsibility for the moral disintegration in the family, but the vulnerability

at the heart of the household that allowed them to intrude is still in place at the end of both novels. Austen's achievement is thus to illustrate not just the possibilities that the managerial role possesses for women and the positive contributions they can make through it but also the limitations of a system that restricts them to the extent that the opportunity to become a household manager, even a surrogate one, becomes so enticing.

The following chapter, which focuses on the figure of the single woman in Austen's novels, will continue to investigate her interest in the ways women can negotiate positions in society that are characterised by a certain level of precariousness. As I will demonstrate, much like with the surrogate managers, Austen uses the characters of her single heroines to depict a variety of different forms of occupation of spaces through which women can circumvent the limits imposed on them by the law. In doing so, she continues to portray the relationships that women can form with property as strikingly powerful and complex.

CHAPTER 3: LIVING

A visitor to Chawton House Library, the house that once belonged to Austen's brother Edward, will be informed by the guides of what is believed to have been Austen's favourite place in the house. Called "the reading alcove," this place consists of a corner in one of the upstairs rooms, with a chair and a small table, usually decorated with books, arranged near a tall window. Here, visitors are told, Austen could sit and read undisturbed, but at the same time observe the arrival of the carriages and be the first one to know that a visitor was coming. This piece of information is in all likelihood fictitious, as it is not corroborated by Austen's letters or her nephew's biography on her, James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*.¹⁵ Chawton House attributes this information to no source and says that it is simply "Knight family legend," passed on by word of mouth. The detail, however, is pleasing to the visitors, usually generating nods of agreement, as if no other place could have been Austen's favourite. Arguably, the fact that this piece of information is not backed up by any actual sources is beside the point. What is interesting about it is the reading of Austen that it offers. The location of "the reading alcove" presents Austen as someone who values privacy but also the social, and who would naturally choose a place that would allow her to have both.

The same view of Austen is presented by G. Barnett Smith who, in 1885, wrote an article entitled "More Views of Jane Austen" for *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Almost seventy years after Austen's death, Smith writes about his experience of visiting her last permanent home, Chawton Cottage, and describes the way in which he envisages Austen's process of writing her novels at her first home, Stevenson parsonage: "But of all that could be seen from the window of a quiet English country parsonage, the whole border land in which the middle and the upper classes melt into each other, she was a perfect mistress, and such a painter as we may never see again" (269). By imagining Austen looking out the window of her house into her neighbours in Steventon, the people about whom, according to Smith, she writes in her novels, he establishes the same combination between ideas of solitude and sociability.

¹⁵ The only biography that mentions it is Hill's *Jane Austen, Her Homes and Her Friends*, which states the following: "But the room which is especially associated with Jane Austen is the 'oak-room,' which has a large recess that stands above the porch. Here the family often sat of an evening" (178). However, even in this excerpt there is no mention of Austen's preference or of her particular occupation of this space.

Taking this representation of Austen as a starting point, my goal will be to elaborate the concept of “living” in her novels. As I will show, solitude and sociability play equally important parts in Austen’s representation of this form of relationship towards property. By focusing on the figure of the single woman, this chapter will analyse the ways in which she is portrayed not thinking of a future house but just inhabiting her father’s, mother’s (in the case of *Sense and Sensibility*) or uncle’s (in the case of *Mansfield Park*). It will demonstrate how Austen’s work is the result of her engagement with contemporary debates about women’s relationship towards property; how, as fictional works, her novels are emancipatory in the way in which they are not just a commentary on contemporary debates about property but a fictionalisation of the ways in which women can circumvent the limitations of the law and establish feelings of ownership towards property. The result of this is not simply a criticism of the current property laws and the ways in which they leave women in a precarious position; it is a legitimisation of women’s abilities and rights as property owners through the representation of the ways in which, through their ingenuity, they refuse to become the victims of the dispossessed state imposed by the law and, instead, establish feelings of ownership towards property, create a sense of purpose for themselves and express their identity through the spaces in which they live.

3.1 Defining living

The term “living” is used with a myriad of meanings in Austen’s novels. One of the most common is as part of the expression “style/manner of living,” to refer to habits, particularly with regards to expenses, such as in the following description of Mrs. Jennings by John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*: “Her house, her style of living, all bespeak an exceeding good income” (170). Some variations place more emphasis on the particular style of living, such as “living economically” (*Sense and Sensibility* 4), “living in a very humble way” (*Persuasion* 124) and “living in very good style” (*Persuasion* 113). Another common usage is that of a position as a member of the church that includes both property and an income, such as in the following speech by Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*: “I was brought up for the church, and I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, had it pleased the gentleman we were speaking of just now” (60). Other uses include occupying a space, such as in “living together” (*Pride*

and *Prejudice* 278) and the state of being alive: “But, on second thoughts, perhaps Lizzy could tell us what relations he has now living, better than any other person” (*Pride and Prejudice* 224). A far less common use is that of devoting oneself to something or someone such as that which refers to Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*: “I shall now live solely for my family” (263).

The usage on which this chapter will focus is the first one. When used in this context, the word “living” can be seen as synonym for “being at home,” but what is being described is far more than just the simple physical occupation of space. Indeed, whenever Austen uses “style of living” as a synonym for someone’s expenditure, she establishes a connection between the domestic space and the social and encompasses ideas on management discussed in the previous chapter. This is visible in *Pride and Prejudice*, in the description of the habits of the Collinses: “Our plain manner of living, our small rooms and few domestics, and the little we see of the world, must make Hunsford extremely dull to a young lady like yourself (164). “Small rooms” is a reference to the architecture of the house, which represents the very moderate wealth of the occupants. “Plain” and “few domestics” allude to bourgeois ideas of management, which would involve the adjustment of one’s expenses to one’s income. This would imply a strict regulation of one’s domestic expenses, such as the number of servants, which would, consequently, constitute signs of the family’s wealth and standing in society. “The little we see of the world,” on the other hand, is a reference to sociability and to the expenses associated with it, therefore connecting the idea of “living” with the social.

The same connection is established in *Emma*, in which the “style of living” of the Coles is described: “They added to their house, to their number of servants, to their expenses of every sort; and by this time were, in fortune and style of living, second only to the family at Hartfield. Their love of society, and their new dining-room, prepared every body for their keeping dinner-company; and a few parties, chiefly among the single men, had already taken place” (162-163). The first sentence illustrates the ways in which the Coles adjusted their management to their new enlarged income and the higher standing in society that they are attempting to claim for themselves because of it, something Austen expresses through the use of the word “added” for all three elements. “Added to their house” references the acquisition of more portable property for the decoration of the interior of the house, as well as potential changes to its architecture intended to make it larger and consequently more imposing; “number of

servants” and “expenses of every sort,” on the other hand, reference changes in management and application of principles of oeconomy. Most importantly, the link established between the words “their love of society” and “their new dining-room” is demonstrative of the way in which Austen represents the domestic interior as a porous space, in which the private and the social are interlinked to the extent that there is not a clear division between one and the other. The dining-room is presented as being decorated in preparation for social events, therefore indicating that their purpose is not the accommodation of simply the members of the family but also the “few parties” through which the Coles establish relationships with the other members of their community.

The Coles are not the only characters in *Emma* through which Austen demonstrates how sociability is incorporated in the concept of “living.” When Mrs. Elton talks about her experience of “living in the country,” she describes it exclusively in terms of opportunities for sociability: “‘If this is living in the country, it is nothing very formidable. From Monday next to Saturday, I assure you we have not a disengaged day! A woman with fewer resources than I have, need not have been at a loss.’ No invitation came amiss to her. Her Bath habits made evening-parties perfectly natural to her, and Maple Grove had given her a taste for dinners” (227). “Living” in this sense, embodies far more than just the notion of inhabiting a house which is located in the countryside. In fact, Mrs. Elton describes “living” as a series of social activities. By saying “we have not a disengaged day,” Mrs. Elton indicates that the couple’s days are spent in receiving or paying visits to their neighbours. Austen then switches from direct to free indirect speech, with the reader still receiving Mrs. Elton’s point of view, in which she once again boasts about the abundance of social events for which she has received invitations.

Another aspect to take into account in Austen’s elaboration of the concept of “living” in her novels is the way in which a family’s income and their management of it through the application of principles of oeconomy regulate their experiences of sociability. This is clear, for example, in the portrayal of two very different characters in *Persuasion*: Sir Walter and Mrs. Smith. Upon being informed of the extent of his debt, Sir Walter is persuaded by his steward, Mr. Shepherd, to quit Kellynch Hall since “It did not appear to him that Sir Walter could materially alter his style of living in a house which had such a character of hospitality and ancient dignity to support” (17). Here, the term “style of living” establishes a connection between the architectural

aspect of Sir Walter's property ("house") and the expectations that are attached to it with regards to sociability. Indeed, "ancient dignity" is a reference to the family's high standing in society, whereas "character of hospitality" expresses the expectations of generosity towards his neighbours that would have been attributed to the owner of such an extensive property. As the head of the family with the highest standing in his community, Sir Walter would have been expected to open his house up to his neighbours and organise social events as a way of establishing and maintaining relationships with them. As such, the domestic space of the house is presented as being closely linked to ideas of rootedness to a community. The extent of one's income, however, severely delimits these possibilities of sociability. Austen makes this particularly clear in the portrayal of the widow Mrs. Smith, whose reduced income circumscribes her to a very different "style of living": "She had come to Bath on that account, and was now in lodgings near the hot baths, living in a very humble way, unable even to afford herself the comfort of a servant, and of course almost excluded from society" (124). "Living in a very humble way" is indicative of the strict principles of oeconomy that Mrs. Smith has been forced to obey due to her reduction in circumstances. The rest of the sentence indicates what the application of these principles entails: foregoing the employment of a servant ("the comfort of a servant"), which is a symbol of social status, and the relinquishment of sociability, due to the impossibility of affording a house where she can receive visitors, and the means of travelling in order to pay visits in return. In this excerpt, Austen contributes to the portrayal of Mrs. Smith's situation as pitiable by intimating the link between one's domestic space and sociability, as well as that a person's "living" is intimately connected with the latter.

This conception of "living" as something which is closely linked with the social is expressed in non-fictional texts contemporary to Austen's novels. In her conduct book *The Parental Monitor*, Bonhote writes about the importance of sociability:

A few congenial, sincere and generous friends are necessary to make life pleasant, and a few simple amusements to fill up our leisure time. We could not be said to live, without society: a life of absolute seclusion from our fellow creatures would be as unpleasant as it would be singular and useless. We were formed to serve, enliven and be friendly with each other; and this social and

benign purpose may be accomplished without living permanently in a crowd, or being constantly engaged. (42)

According to Bonhote, there is no “living” without sociability, as the latter is an essential element of the first. “A life of absolute seclusion” is presented as something unenviable, not just because it would be unnatural (“singular”) but because it would be immoral (“useless”). Bonhote justifies this last aspect by arguing that sociability is a duty human beings owe to each other. “Serve,” “enliven” and “be friendly” relate to different aspects of the concept of sociability: “serve” is a reference to ideas of hospitality and generosity, whereas “enliven” and “be friendly” express ideas of affability. The warning against “living permanently in a crowd, or being constantly engaged” is expressive of the fear of luxury and dissipation that characterised the discourse of virtually every conduct book of the period. This last section of Bonhote’s argument, however, only cautions against what she regards as excessive sociability, which is suggestive of her belief that it is not something that is by nature incompatible with the domestic space and its enjoyment. Indeed, the contrast presented in the excerpt between “a few congenial, sincere and generous friends” and “a crowd” is indicative of what Bonhote means by sociability: the establishment of relationships with a limited set of people of similar interests, as opposed to the superficial gratification of surrounding oneself with strangers.

The 1825 *Domestic Duties; or, Instructions to Young Married Ladies, on the Management of Their Household* by Frances Parker goes farther than *The Parental Monitor* by demonstrating the ways in which the domestic space and sociability are intimately connected, as well as that they are both incorporated in the concept of “living.” *Domestic Duties* is written in the form of a dialogue between two female friends, Mrs. B. and Mrs. L., in which they discuss various topics related to conduct and management. At one point, Mrs. L. expresses her thoughts on a house that she has recently visited: “Altogether it was a brilliant room, but however I might feel pleased with it at that moment, I now question the taste which had, in thus multiplying ornaments, dappled the room rather for lounging and self-indulgence, than for the purpose of social intercourse” (199). The room described is a drawing-room, which is “crowded with tables and slabs, upon which were arranged various specimens of ingenuity and taste” to the point that Mrs. L. can “hardly recollect half of what I saw” (198-199). Through the character of Mrs. L., Parker expresses the idea that furniture should be chosen

according to the purpose of the room in question. In this particular case, the lady of the house has decorated the room in such a way as to make it suitable for her own use (“lounging and self-indulgence”) but not for the reception of visitors (“social intercourse”), which is part of its purpose as a drawing-room. The focus on this aspect of the decoration conveys the idea that one does not live in isolation, that there is not a clear and strict division – and there should not be – between the domestic space and the social. This conversation between the two characters significantly focuses on a woman’s role in the decoration of the house, as well as in what constitutes an appropriate use of what in Austen’s period were termed “accomplishments,” described in the excerpt as “specimens of ingenuity and taste.” *Domestic Duties* thus engages with the contemporary dialogue on female accomplishments. It is this dialogue, addressed by both non-fictional and fictional books, and the way in which it relates to ideas of women’s occupation of the domestic space that will be the focus of the following section.

3.2 Debating decoration

The dialogue on accomplishments and their place in female education is a complex one, which lasted until far into the nineteenth century. As Vickery affirms, “there was no unanimity even on what counted as an accomplishment, never mind on whether they should be promoted, tolerated or banned” (*Behind Closed Doors* 233). According to Vickery, the “positive definition” of accomplishment was “a faculty attained by study and practice that completed or perfected a person for society, adding delicacy of taste and elegance of manners to accuracy of knowledge and correctness of thought” (233). This definition conveys, on one hand, the idea of accomplishments as aptitudes that prepare women for sociability (“perfected a person for society”). On the other hand, “delicacy of taste” and “elegance of manners” place a focus on exterior – or physical – benefits, whereas “accuracy of knowledge” and “correctness of thought” refer to interior – or intellectual – advantages. The intellectual and the physical are therefore not presented as incompatible, but as complementary, and the accomplishment is something that is indicated as having the ability to improve both. The same idea is expressed in the definition of accomplishment offered by the *OED*, as “an acquired skill or ability regarded as contributing to a person’s perfection or completeness.” The

definition in Johnson's *Dictionary* is more concise, but it also combines the two elements: "completion, full performance; elegance; ornament of mind."

However, it was precisely what they saw as the superficial quality of accomplishments and their lack of benefits to a woman's mind that fueled the disdain on the part of some critics towards them. As the previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, conduct books from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century set out to present an archetype of female excellence that was intended as a clear contrast to the former aristocratic model. These authors condemned that aristocratic system of female education which, by encouraging the display of women's bodies, cultivated their vanity and the idea that their value lay in their physical rather than moral and intellectual attributes. Whereas an accomplishment was in its definition an "ornament of the mind," it was the ways in which it was used more as an ornament of the body than anything else that various authors of very different political affiliations – such as Wollstonecraft and More – criticised.

In her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, More is very critical of the encouragement of exhibitionism in the teaching of accomplishments to young women:

To allure and to shine is the great principle sedulously inculcated into her young heart; and is considered as the fundamental maxim; and, perhaps, if we were required to condense the reigning system of the brilliant education of a lady into an aphorism, it might be comprised in this short sentence, *to make the most of herself*. This system however is the fruitful germ, from which a thousand yet unborn vanities, with all their multiplied ramifications will spring. (84, emphasis in the original)

Such a teaching of accomplishments would thus objectify women and foster vanity in them. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft also criticises this aspect of accomplishments by focusing on that of needlework. According to her, "this employment contracts their [women's] faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, by confining their thoughts to their persons" (147). Arguing that, unlike men, who simply order their clothes and "have done with the subject" (147), women concern themselves too much with the decoration of their pieces of clothing and spend unreasonable amounts of time on them, to the point that it

consumes their every thought. Wollstonecraft considers that women are “degraded” by this use of accomplishments in order to decorate their bodies, not least because “their motive is simply vanity” (147). The problem with this particular accomplishment would be, therefore, that it encourages women to focus on the improvement of their physical attributes rather than intellectual and moral ones. Wollstonecraft reinforces this point when she argues that accomplishments are only of value when its acquirement stimulates other qualities in the woman, such as “a fondness for the art, and a desire of excellence” (22). Otherwise, it is simply “a drawing or two (half done by the matter) to hang up in their rooms,” a mediocre effort that prevents women from “cultivating the more important” intellectual accomplishments, and “at best but trifles” (22).

As the second chapter of this thesis has illustrated, the former aristocratic mode of female excellence was considered problematic in the way that it robbed women of subjectivity and the ability to step outside of themselves, to put their own personal interests and desires aside, which was necessary to the management of the household and all of its inhabitants. Interestingly, most of the same arguments used to criticise accomplishments are also resorted to in the condemnation of what is considered by the authors to be a woman’s excessive preoccupation with her physical appearance. Indeed, the consequences of each are the same, as they threaten to stand in the way of a woman performing her role as manager of the property and the family in a responsible manner. In the previously mentioned *The Parental Monitor*, for example, Bonhote declares that “a young girl, vain of her beauty, and whose chief study and employment is the decoration of her person, is a most contemptible character” (125). According to Bonhote, this vanity and constant search for admiration would have perilous consequences for the entire family: “Few men would venture to marry a woman whose taste and inclination would lead her to spend double the income of her portion in the decoration of her person” (104). Bonhote thus demonstrates the way in which ideas of oeconomy were seen as relevant to the dialogue on decoration, both of the house and of the woman’s body, by arguing that a woman who has been taught to only think of herself and her desires will not be able to control these in order to successfully manage the family’s property.

This excerpt is illustrative of the anxiety prompted by the possibility that a taste for decoration would distract a woman from the performance of her other duties and responsibilities. In *Novel Craft*, Shaffer explains the important ways in which “[t]he

gender and class associations of handicraft altered by the middle of the nineteenth-century” (30) which could be seen as accounting for this anxiety:

The high-status embroidery, drizzling, and collage crafts of the eighteenth century had been prized for their aristocratic associations and practiced by men as well as women. But in the early nineteenth-century, handicraft became coded as a woman’s hobby specifically, as it was increasingly identified with a middle-class sensibility, as a thrifty, skillful mode of domestic management ... handicraft now signified the moral, managerial virtues of the bourgeoisie, not just aristocratic leisure ... In the nineteenth-century, when high-art venues were largely closed off to women, they channeled their creative urges into the world around them, using the elements most readily available. This kind of domestic decoration was also sanctioned because it added to the comforts of the home, whereas more ambitious high art was condemned as a selfish use of time taken away from the family. (33)

Schaffer thus explains how a distinction emerged between decorative work that was considered to be commendable – that which turned the home into a personalised and comfortable space – and work that was viewed negatively, as it distracted women from other managerial tasks and was therefore considered “a selfish use of time.” Yet, as I explained in the previous chapter, various late eighteenth-century texts demonstrate that these ideas had originated before the period to which Schaffer refers. Authors such as Bonhote, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, can already be seen to distance themselves from the previous model of “aristocratic leisure” and move towards a use of accomplishments and decoration in a way that benefits the other members of the household.

Schaffer also affirms that this “thrifty, skillful mode” of decorative work came to be associated with the values of the middle class. As Franco Moretti has observed, “one of the most significant preconditions” to “participate fully in the values and practices of bourgeois culture” was free time: “One needs a stable income clearly above the minimum ... the wife and the mother as well as the children must be, to some degree, set free from the necessities of work ... [Plenty] of space (functionally specialised rooms in the house or apartment) and time for cultural activities and leisure [are also necessary]” (380). This idea is corroborated in More’s *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, which

presents time and money for decoration as the prerogative of a certain class: “‘We have always,’ replied Phoebe, ‘a particular satisfaction in observing a neat little flower garden about a cottage, because it holds out a comfortable indication that the inhabitants are free from absolute want, because they think of these little embellishments’” (340).

In his 1809 *Ackermann's Repository*, Rudolph Ackermann describes female decorative work in these terms: as the prerogative of women of a certain class, who are able to cultivate their artistic talents. Arguably because the encouragement of women's taste for furniture and decoration would be beneficial to his lithographic business, Ackermann presents a woman's desire to decorate the house in which she lives as commendable:

The talent for drawing, which has been cultivated with so much success by some ladies of high rank, enabled them to decorate several articles of furniture in a very novel and tasteful manner. A laudable emulation in the higher circles caused this species of art to become a fashion, and an extensive variety of ornamental furniture has been produced by ladies; many articles of which have lost nothing even in comparison with the works of the very clever professional artists. (Agius 103)

The last sentence establishes a comparison between professional and amateur artists, stating that, as a result of the time and effort these women put into their work, their creations are of a quality comparable to the work of professionals. Furthermore, it also points to the active role that these women play in the decoration of their houses and, as a result, in the definition of what is considered to be fashionable or otherwise. This excerpt refers particularly to fire screens, but other parts of the *Repository* comment on women's abilities in distinctive kinds of decorative work. On a section about lady's work tables, it is stated that the interior of the table “may exhibit some pleasing landscape, or any other similar embellishment, according to the taste or fancy of the fair proprietor” (144). That a woman would possess the ingenuity and the wish to personalise her items of furniture through her own manual work and according to her taste is here taken for granted.

While many of Ackermann's contemporaries would have agreed with him on this last point, female decoration and accomplishments in general posed, as has been

demonstrated, too many risks to be left unregulated. This is made clear in the short novel *The Warren Family, or Scenes at Home* by W. S., believed to have been published in the 1810s. It begins with the aunt's redecoration of her home, and "the great alteration for the better" of one of the parlours through the use of wallpaper, which gives her young nieces – Lucy and Charlotte, described as being "about 12 and 14" – the idea to redecorate their own room by using the same material (5). "[Approving] of her nieces' desire to make their room as neat as they could," the aunt offers to pay for the materials and they agree to redecorate the room themselves (7). The fact that it is considered natural for the young women to do this sort of manual labour themselves, alongside other pieces of information, indicates that the family belongs to the middle classes. Resorting to an unmistakably didactic tone, the novel uses the description of the progress of the decorative work to inculcate a variety of lessons. First, a focus is placed on the need to adapt to one's circumstances and to do the best with what one is given, including one's income, prevalent in many contemporary conduct books directed at the middle and genteel classes, as the previous chapter demonstrated. This is representative of ideas on responsible consumption and the condemnation of luxury which, as has been demonstrated, constituted an essential aspect of the new bourgeois model of female excellence. The mother of the two young women expresses throughout the novel the idea that one must strive for personal betterment, another common principle in conduct book literature. The author also emphasises the importance of not allowing aesthetic concerns to get in the way of the young women's other occupations. Although the father considers their wish to improve their room "both innocent and proper" (15), once the decorative efforts threaten to interfere with the education of the young women and their managerial activities, such as the practice of charity and the education of their five younger siblings, it becomes a problem.

After the decorations are completed, the four-year-old brother destroys part of the border and the wallpaper in the newly-decorated room. When the mother intervenes, she tells the young women that they need to give less importance to the decorations and not be downcast by this, as it must be obvious to them that what the brother did was unintentional. In doing so, the mother admonishes the daughters for what she considers to be their selfishness: by holding on to their resentment for the brother, there is a danger that the education of the younger siblings, presented as one of their responsibilities, might be neglected. It is interesting that this demonstration of lack of consideration for the hard work of the two sisters should be performed by the

young male and heir of the family. This action, which distracts Lucy and Charlotte from the pursuit of their own interests, can be interpreted as a reminder of their duty towards the brother and the rest of the family. In this sense, this episode expresses the patriarchal ideology driving the idea that any work around the house done solely for a woman's own benefit must inevitably be selfish.

While on this occasion the mother refers to the decorations as "a trifle" (24), the same word used by Wollstonecraft to refer to certain kinds of accomplishments (*Vindication* 22), the young women's wish to decorate their room, first with wallpaper and then with bed curtains, is presented as something understandable and even commendable (24). This is expressed not just through the episodes about the decoration of their room, but also through the explanation of the way in which their time is divided. Indeed, both sisters devote two hours a day to painting and craft work, something of which the parents approve. The lesson the novel attempts to teach is that decorative work, as well as any other domestic activity, should not take precedence over all others, particularly those that contribute to the welfare of the other members of the household. This idea is also conveyed through the episode in which the two girls save the life of their old servant by offering her the money they had intended for new bed curtains so that she can pay for her lodging. Without the money to pay for the accommodation, the servant would be forced to vacate it, a move that her daughter is certain she would not be able to survive. This chapter, entitled "A charitable action" ends with the thought that the girls slept better in the bed due to their good actions than they would have had it been nicely decorated. Ultimately, they devise the scheme of making and selling shirts to raise the amount they need. Secretly, the servant's daughter makes shirts in her spare time, as a way of thanking them for helping her mother. Because of this, Lucy and Charlotte obtain the funds for the curtains sooner than they expected and finish the decorations in their room, having learnt the lesson that their indulgence should not take precedence over the practice of charity towards those in need.

The novel regards the desire to acquire accomplishments and to decorate as something not problematic in itself but warns that, if left unregulated, it poses the danger of distracting a young woman from her duties towards her family. And yet, the figure of the young brother in *The Warren Family* serves arguably not just as a reminder of the young women's duty towards the family in general, but towards the male members in particular. Schaffer explains this link between the three elements (the

woman, decorations and the family), as well as the ways in which they are connected to the “thrifty, skillful mode” of decorative work of the middle classes:

Craft items were made by the home’s female inhabitant and thus appeared to be an extension of her body, as well as carrying the signs of her taste and skill. The woman’s hands had held it, her mind had planned it, her eyes had gauged it, and she had communicated something of her intangible subjectivity to the completed object ... The craft was the woman’s home skills made concrete, a tangible trace of her household labor that was all the more valuable for having been produced in leisured hours, for it showed that labor was leisure, that she never stopped working to improve the domestic abode. Its finished appearance also testified to the neatness and delicacy of the domestic woman’s body. (33)

As discussed in the previous chapter, conduct book literature was responsible for establishing a connection between the signs of a woman’s management around the house and her body and morality. According to Schaffer, the same can be said about a woman’s decorative work, as the objects produced by her ingenuity are viewed as extensions of her body, as well as her personality and talents. Furthermore, Schaffer’s argument makes apparent what was only hinted at in *The Warren Family*: the patriarchal undertones behind some teleological ideas of what constituted appropriate female handicrafts and decorations. Indeed, according to such ideas, decorative work is something that a woman does in order to contribute to the welfare of her family, to make the home more pleasant for *them*, and not something done for her own benefit or pleasure. Consequently, even activities that have the appearance of leisure are regarded as work, so long as they contribute to the beautification and general improvement of the home for the benefit of the husband, children or other family members.

These patriarchal undertones are illustrated in an example presented by Vickery: the notes of a Northumberland curate in which he “listed needlework, along with piety, beauty and money, as assets in a potential bride in 1722” (*Behind Closed Doors* 241). This woman’s dowry would have included “materials for a room, that is hangings, bed, window curtains and a dozen chairs, all her own work” (241), alongside her fortune. It is worth considering the reasons why the curate would have felt the need to include these items when he listed the advantages of marrying this particular

woman. Indeed, these decorations are presented as evidence of the woman's practice of the "thrifty, skilful mode" (Schaffer 33) of decoration mentioned previously. A prospective groom would therefore be informed of this woman's capacity to use her talents and abilities in order to turn the house into a comfortable place for her husband. By including them in this list, the curate is attributing a specific and patriarchal purpose to female decorative work: that of benefitting the husband. Vickery illustrates how some male conservative conduct book authors legitimised female decorations by emphasising the ways in which they could be used for the benefit of the husband and to make the home more comfortable and pleasant for him. This would be done mainly by quoting passages of the Bible that portrayed talent for decorative work as something desirable in a wife: "female handicrafts were endorsed by God, exemplified by the virtuous woman of Proverbs, who clothed her children and ornamented her household to the credit of her husband" (Vickery 22). These conduct book authors, in which the Reverend James Fordyce, author of *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Ellis, author of the *Country Housewife's Family Companion* (1750), were included, thus considered that "the Bible authorised the exercise of female taste in the home" (Vickery 22), so long as it was used for the benefit of her husband.

However, it was not just male authors who made this patriarchal and conservative case for female decoration of the house. Discussing the decoration of a woman's body rather than that of the house, but still using the same arguments, an anonymous author of *La Belle Assemblée*, in a section entitled "Fashion," argued that when a woman's decoration of her own body "springs from the desire of decorating the person with modest ornaments, and rendering it amiable in the eyes of man, it is praise-worthy; and then it is the true offspring of love. When its object is to feed conceit, and to administer pride, to purvey for coquetry, and cherish self-love, it is the child of vanity" (93). The author of this article thus establishes the difference between decorations that are done for the woman's own benefit and to satisfy her own desires, and those done with the husband's satisfaction in mind.

It is probably publications such as these that have led authors like Deborah Kaplan to conclude that the system of genteel domesticity in this period was repressive to women. According to Kaplan, this system "limited women's self-expressiveness by offering not only just one way of life but that particular life-style: one which required self-restraint and self-denial. Control yourself, conduct books urged women again and again ... In short, women were not to gratify themselves in any way" (41). However,

it is wrong to conclude that because these publications existed and were expressly directed at genteel women that they were well received by all of them. Moreover, the idea that all conduct books endorsed homogeneously repressive lifestyles for women is also misleading. Indeed, even conduct books that argued in favour of women utilising their accomplishments in order to contribute to their husbands' comfort did not necessarily frame this argument in the teleological, patriarchal and conservative terms Kaplan describes.

Domestic Duties, for example, argues that "talents and acquirement lose half their value, when they cause a neglect of any quality by which the comfort, or well-doing of a domestic circle may be promoted" (93). In this sense, Parker agrees with the author of *The Warren Family*, since she also expresses the idea that accomplishments should not get in the way of a woman's performance of her duties towards the other members of the family: "Accomplishments may claim some share of time and attention for the purpose of ornamenting and refining social life, but they should never engross the mind so much as to render impossible, or distasteful the fulfilment of every branch of duty, whether of great or of little importance" (93). Rather than simply tell women what accomplishments should *not* be for, Parker acknowledges that female accomplishments can be useful in facilitating sociability ("ornamenting and refining social life"). Indeed, "ornamenting" works as a reference to female decorative work and the ways in which it can be used for embellishing the domestic space at the same time as preparing it for the reception of visitors. "Refining," on the other hand, refers to ideas on taste and the ways in which this is expressed through a woman's accomplishments, and it can also be seen as referencing the types of accomplishments that can be used to entertain the guests, such as the ability to sing or play an instrument. Moreover, this extract demonstrates the porousness of the domestic space, since sociability is represented as connecting the private space of the home with the public space of the neighbourhood. Women are presented as having an important role in the establishment of this connection, as they are the ones who prepare the domestic space for the reception of the guests.

Domestic Duties cannot be said to exclusively align itself with patriarchal and conservative ideas on female accomplishments. On the contrary, its depiction of the important role women play in facilitating sociability and the ways in which accomplishments can be used in this context is enabling. In these passages, accomplishments are not presented as something done exclusively to please the

husband, as it is assumed that women will take pleasure from sociability and the active role that they play in promoting it. Furthermore, in the same conversation the two characters conclude that accomplishments also hold value in their ability to attach a woman to the home, independently of whether she uses them for the satisfaction of people other than herself: “Accomplishments, too, may be of considerable value to their possessors, independent of the use which they may serve within the social circle. The greater part of a woman’s life ought to be, and necessarily must be, passed at home” (369). In this instance, accomplishments are presented as resources through which a woman can improve her attachment towards the domestic space.

Like Parker, various other conduct book authors described accomplishments as having benefits both for the woman herself, as well as her family and acquaintances. More, for example, affirms in her *Strictures* that it is “not the possession, but the application” of “those accomplishments of which we have been reprobating,” and that the “true end” of accomplishments is “to enliven business, to animate retirement, to embellish the charming scene of family delights, to heighten the interesting pleasures of social intercourse, and rising to their noblest object, to adorn the doctrine of God her Saviour” (2: 162). According to More, therefore, the use of a young woman’s time for accomplishments was not only commendable when done to assist the other members of the family, but also when used to make the time spent at home more pleasurable to herself (“to animate retirement”). Edgeworth agrees with this by declaring that “every art, however trifling in itself, which tends to enliven and embellish domestic life, must be advantageous, not only to the female sex, but to society in general” (325). Gisborne – whose conduct book we know Austen read – considers that the foremost benefit of accomplishments is that they allow women to occupy their time at home in a way that is stimulating to them, and hence increase their attachment to the domestic space: “to supply her hours of leisure with innocent and amusing occupations, occupations which may prevent the languor and the snares of idleness, render home attractive, refresh the wearied faculties” (80). Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the ways in which accomplishments allow a woman, through the improvement of the domestic space and of her own faculties, to develop an attachment towards her family members and neighbours: “and in the next place, to enable her to communicate a kindred pleasure, with all its beneficial effects, to her family and friends, to all with whom she is now, or may hereafter, be intimately connected” (80-81). These authors imagine the self as being always socially situated. Parker, More,

Edgeworth and Gisborne may envision female accomplishments being practiced in “retirement” in the private sphere, but by emphasising their potential to encourage sociability they do not confine them to it. Instead, they present accomplishments not as a means to shield women from the public sphere and keep them isolated, but as something that allows women to play an active role in the establishment of a connection between the domestic and the public sphere.

It is too simplistic, therefore, to present conduct books as arguing invariably in favour of complete “self-restraint and self-denial” for women (Kaplan 41). However, this acknowledgement of a more enabling side to the commendation of female accomplishments is not an attempt to portray them as completely and universally enabling and to ignore the fact that many women found them to be repressive. Indeed, it is not difficult to find examples of female authors in this period who expressed a distaste for accomplishments and for staying at home in general. Kathryn Kirkpatrick, in her introduction to *Marriage*, presents Susan Ferrier, a contemporary of Austen’s, as someone who much preferred to be outside of the home than inside, and whose letters express the opposition between “the suffocation of drawing-rooms” and “the pleasures of the open air,” such as in the following one: “I feel quite different those days I don’t get out from those that I spent in the fields ... dawdling about from morning till night is life to me” (xvi). Frances Power Cobbe, born shortly after Austen’s death, demonstrates that female accomplishments were still a contentious topic in her lifetime. In 1878, she wrote that “if the problem had been set to devise something, the doing of which would engage the very fewest and smallest powers of the mind or body, I know not whether we should give the prize for solving it to the inventor of knitting, netting, crochet, or worsted work” (288). She also described the decorative objects resulting from the practice of these accomplishments as serving no purpose: “a drawing-room crammed with these useless fads – chairs, cushions, screens, and antimacassars – is simply a mausoleum of the wasted hours of the female part of the family” (288).

These would not have been Austen’s views on female decorative work. In a letter written after Austen’s death by her niece Caroline, she mentions that her aunt was skilled in needlework and enjoyed it as an activity: “I don’t believe Aunt Jane observed any particular method in parceling out her day but I think she generally sat in the drawing room till luncheon; when visitors were there, chiefly at work – She was fond of work – and she was a great adept at overcast and satin stitch – the peculiar delight

of that day – General handiness and neatness were amongst her characteristics” (Le Faye, *A Family Record* 159). An example of Austen’s mastery in this particular accomplishment is the quilt that her family have kept and is today exhibited at Chawton Cottage, her former residence. This description by Caroline would indicate that Austen was far from being opposed to doing decorative work or from considering it to be incompatible with her other interests, particularly her writing. On the contrary, Austen’s life very much demonstrates decorative work to be something that can actually enable writing. Austen’s letters contain descriptions of ongoing decorations both in her more permanent houses (Steventon and Chawton) and in her temporary ones (Bath and Southampton). For example, in November of 1800, Austen describes the family’s latest decorative efforts in Steventon:

The Tables are come, & give general contentment. I had not expected that they should so perfectly suit the fancy of us all three, or that we should so well agree in the disposition of them ... The two ends put together form our constant Table for everything, & the centre piece stands exceedingly well under the glass; holds a great deal most commodiously, without looking awkwardly. (57)

Austen and her family left Steventon for Bath in 1801, where her father, Mr. Austen, died in 1805. After her father’s death, Austen, her mother and sister stayed in Bath until the summer of 1806, and subsequently moved to a house in Southampton in the autumn of 1806. They remained at Southampton until July 1809, when they made their final move to Chawton. In the letters written during the period in which they lived in Southampton, Austen provides her sister Cassandra with detailed descriptions of the decorative work taking place around the house. In February of 1807 she writes: “The garret beds are made, and ours will be finished to-day ... This week we shall do more, and I should like to have all the five beds completed by the end of it. There will then be the window curtains, sofa-cover, and a carpet to be altered” (126). Southampton was part of the peripatetic period of Austen’s life, from her father’s retirement and the family’s move to Bath in 1801 to 1809, during which she famously did very little writing. In the spring of 1803 Austen sold her manuscript of *Susan*, later retitled *Northanger Abbey*, to a London publisher, Richard Crosby & Son and, according to Le Faye, wrote a draft of a new novel, *The Watsons*, which would never be completed (*A Family Record* 127-128). In contrast to this, whilst in Steventon and afterwards in

Chawton, her two permanent homes, Austen was very prolific, writing her *Juvenilia* and *Susan* – later changed to *Northanger Abbey* – drafting *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in the first location and completing five novels in total in the second one.

The difference in productivity does not lie in the amount of domestic and decorative work: if anything, it makes sense that the Austen women and their friend Martha, who moved in with them, would have spent more time decorating the house in Chawton and improving it than the one in Southampton or the other temporary residences in Bath. There is also no reason to believe that there would have been more work for Austen to do in Southampton or Bath than in Chawton. Instead, a factor that surely contributed to the difference in productivity and creative inspiration is the kind of home that Austen was allowed to build for herself in each location. In fact, for the first time after losing Steventon, in Chawton Austen was given the privilege of a stable, long-term home, that she and the other women could call their own and modify and improve in any way they wanted. This would have been the reason behind Austen's strong reaction when she found out that Chawton Cottage was at risk of being lost and, soon after that, that the will of her uncle Mr. Leigh Perrot, which could have guaranteed the women's financial stability, left them with nothing. Austen's biographer Deirdre Le Faye describes this moment as "a serious relapse" (*A Family Record* 222) in her illness, and Austen admitted in her letters that she had been affected by it.¹⁶ It is significant that Austen reportedly also had a strong reaction when she was informed that the family was leaving Steventon, but never reacted in this way to the loss of the houses in Bath and Southampton. This is despite the fact that, in reality, any of the houses in Bath or Southampton legally belonged to Austen or to any of the Austen women just as much as the ones in Chawton and Steventon. What was at stake in this case, therefore, was not the loss of just any house, but the loss of one that, through their decorations and ingenuity, had been turned into a home that the women felt was their own. The formation of a sense of belonging to a house entails not just the development of feelings of rootedness to it but also feelings of ownership over it. Austen's nervous attack can consequently be seen as an example of what Wynne describes as "painful moments of realisation of women's dispossessed state" (9) after

¹⁶ On 6th April 1817 Austen wrote to her brother Charles about the adverse effect that the news about her uncle's will had on her nerves and general health: "A few days ago my complaint appeared removed, but I am ashamed to say that shock of my Uncle's Will brought on a relapse ... I am the only one of the Legatees who has been so silly, but a weak Body must excuse weak Nerves" (Le Faye, *Letters* 354).

the establishment of feelings of ownership that, despite not being supported by the law, had been, up until then, left unchallenged. From her personal experience, Austen learnt the importance of the sense of rootedness and security that comes from a permanent house, as well as the ways in which living in such a place allows for the expression of one's identity. This awareness is clear in her work, but Austen's novels are also far more than just a commentary on the precarious position of women in this period or a criticism of the unjust property laws that left them comparatively disadvantaged. In them, Austen legitimises female ownership through the portrayal of the ways in which, through their abilities, her female characters are able to circumvent the limitations imposed on them by the law, create feelings of ownership towards the spaces in which they live and, ultimately, express their identities through them.

3.3 Creators of spaces

When in 1869 Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew, published her letters for the very first time as part of *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, he included in its introduction a warning for the reader:

A wish has sometimes been expressed that some of Jane Austen's letters should be published. Some entire letters, and many extracts, will be given in this memoir; but the reader must be warned not to expect too much from them. The style is always clear, and generally animated, while a vein of humour continually gleams through the whole; but the materials may be thought inferior to the execution, for they treat only of the details of domestic life. (Austen-Leigh 50-51)

Austen-Leigh's belief that the reader should be cautioned against "expect[ing] too much" from the letters because they contained "only the details of domestic life" is indicative of the disinteresting character that he attributed to Austen's telling of her daily activities. Kaplan asserts that this opinion would have been shared by Austen herself, and sees in the self-deprecating tone women such as her adopt in their letters when describing their occupations an "[echo] of the patriarchal view of their domestic activities as trivial and unimportant" (49). Kaplan declares that "Although their letters frequently conveyed news of their families, women did not view their child-care or

socialising as news-worthy” and presents as an example Austen’s letter to her sister Cassandra in which she describes her experiences as “important nothings” and “little events” (49). While Kaplan’s observations about Austen’s letters are correct, in the sense that Austen did use the seemingly self-deprecatory expressions Kaplan mentions, the motive she assigns to them is not. Although it may be true that women like Austen begin descriptions of their everyday activities with an apparent reluctance to draw too much attention or assign too much importance to them, it is not accurate to automatically conclude that they did not consider these occupations to be valuable or interesting. The unassuming expressions Kaplan refers to can instead be attributed to modesty or quite simply courtesy towards the correspondent and a reluctance to give the appearance that they believe their occupations to be more interesting than those of the other person. Furthermore, many of these women, including Austen, are corresponding with other women who, at least to a certain extent, engage in similar everyday activities. The correspondence between them becomes, therefore, a means of communicating experiences that they fully expect will be considered to be interesting by the other person and even resonate with them. What is discernible in these letters is not a self-deprecatory tone that indicates that the other person’s activities must be superior in importance or appeal to theirs, but a means of not giving the impression that they believe precisely the opposite, that their own are superior. This is not motivated, as Kaplan indicates, by an internalised feeling of inferiority, but an eagerness to talk about experiences that are important to them and that they feel the correspondent will be interested in, without appearing to undervalue the importance of the other person’s own experiences.

Providing once more the example of Austen, Kaplan goes on to add that “the more talented and self-conscious writers often used irony to invest women’s experience with more significance than men’s” (75). As Kaplan writes, “The same women who could describe their experiences as ‘little concerns’ or ‘important nothings’ also valued the experiences of daily, domestic life. As Jane Austen told Cassandra, ‘You know how interesting the purchase of a sponge cake is to me’” (76). The example is a poor one since, as with various sections of Austen’s letters to her sister, it is fraught with irony and meant as a joke. Nevertheless, Kaplan does go on to provide examples in which Austen’s use of irony is employed as a means of describing something she believes her sister will find interesting. Once again, Kaplan’s interpretation of the contents of the letters is contentious. Indeed, she presents what is arguably a pessimistic view of the

ways in which women engaged in their everyday activities, and describes this attribution of importance to those activities as problematic:

The women's culture criticised the ideology of domesticity by reversing its value structure, by putting women and their experiences and desires first. Nevertheless, such criticism did not challenge the gentry's patriarchal culture. Rather, it enabled accommodation. Because the women's culture viewed domesticity as valuable, it helped women to accept and endure their subordination. (78)

According to Kaplan, therefore, the activities in which women engaged constituted an endurance on their part, one that was sometimes palatable, but only due to the high praise that the discourse of genteel domesticity bestowed upon it. Kaplan also affirms that women followed the dictates of conduct books, which according to her exhorted women to "not gratify themselves in any way" (41).

As the previous section has demonstrated, however, it is problematic to see conduct books as homogeneously framing their arguments in the patriarchal and conservative terms Kaplan mentions. Furthermore, it also does not follow that the women to whom these works were directed would have agreed with the ideas presented in them. A similar point is made by Jennie Batchelor in *Women's Work*:

If certain kinds of evidence, particularly the conduct book, can be used to support accounts of a decline in female employment opportunities and the rise of a restrictive model of domesticity that relegated women to the home, then other texts, particularly imaginative texts, suggest the need for a rather more complex narrative ... one that registers the multiple ways in which work and womanhood were mutually and, in many instances, positively constructed in the period. (18)

As Batchelor asserts, fictional texts force us to reconsider the idea that the conduct book rhetoric of confining genteel domesticity was widely internalised by women. Batchelor also indicates the potential that fictional texts possess for a more complex representation of questions related with women, work and the domestic space. In similarity to Batchelor's argument, Wynne also emphasises the ways in which fictional

works offer alternative, as well as more complex and emancipatory, representations of such themes. As she explains, “Novels do not simply reflect life; they do the important cultural work of exploring ideas, aspirations and anxieties. Literature thus exposes areas of experience which cannot be articulated so clearly in other forms of representation” (7). In her study of Victorian novels, Wynne demonstrates how these works represent women developing and asserting feelings of ownership towards property that they could not possibly have owned legally. As Wynne affirms, even though before the Women’s Property Act in 1882 women lost all rights to ownership after they got married, numerous real-life cases also exist of nineteenth century women acting out on their feelings of ownership regardless of the dictates of the law. For Wynne, this demonstrates that property “is as much about hopes and dreams as it is about legal rights” and that “a lack of property rights does not automatically preclude a sense of ownership,” since “a belief in possession and a performance of ownership can in many instances constitute ownership” (15). Literature can thus express the variety and complexity of people’s relationships to property, as well as the ways in which these are independent from the dictates of the law. Wynne, however, focuses solely on women’s relationship with portable property. Although it is true that that this kind of property features in interesting ways in Austen’s novels, she does not limit female feelings of ownership to portable property. Objects in Austen are also not something that provide women with a sense of ownership, thereby allowing them to forget about the lack of legal ownership over the houses in which they live, such as is the case of the novels analysed by Wynne. On the contrary, portable property, particularly objects of the woman’s own making, constitute a means through which a woman creates a personalised space that expresses her identity, and through which she establishes and asserts feelings of ownership towards the larger, non-portable property that is the house in which she lives.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* Armstrong also reveals the potential fictional texts have to represent a reality that is not yet in existence, arguing against the idea that they are simply fictionalisations of an existent reality. As Armstrong affirms, “the domestic novel antedated – was indeed necessarily antecedent to – the way of life it represented” (9) therefore evidencing the fact that fiction is both “the document and the agency of cultural history” (23). Furthermore, Armstrong argues that these representations were political in nature, but that its political – and consequently subversive – aspect was somewhat obscured by the fact that the events in the novel

took place in domestic settings: “these stories of courtship and marriage offered their readers a way of indulging, with a kind of impunity, in fantasies of political power that were the more acceptable because they were played out within a domestic framework” (29). Armstrong’s ideas are also applicable to the representation of female property ownership in Austen’s novels, since, as I will demonstrate, these feature acts of assertion of ownership that would not have been supported by the law for several years to come. These illicit acts of ownership by women towards property can be regarded as political in nature: by allowing their characters to perform acts of assertion of ownership over property, the author of that novel is making it possible for their readers to engage in what Armstrong terms “fantasies of political power.” In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries property and political power were intimately connected, with voting being out of limits to anyone who was not a male property owner until the Representation of the People Act of 1918. Estates were also built with the goal of showcasing the political power of their owners. Therefore, by featuring female characters engaging in the development and assertion of feelings of ownership towards property within the space of the domestic novel, an author is able to represent aspirations of female political power, whilst at the same time making these representations appear less contentious.

This is precisely what Austen achieves by exploiting certain fictional ways to allow her single female heroines to circumvent laws which limited women’s right to possession. Austen’s novels can be said to be political in this sense, because in them she does not just offer a realistic portrayal of what life would have been like for a single woman in her period or expose the injustice of the current property laws, but unmistakably legitimises female ownership. Indeed, all of Austen’s novels feature a single woman who is portrayed resisting dispossession and displacement in some way or another. Whenever the former home of the new dispossessed heroine is taken away from her, she reacts by creating her own home in whatever way she likes and in her own image, thus taking ownership over it. After the opportunity to express her identity – which was done through her occupation and personalisation of the previous house – is taken away from her, she resists by expressing her identity and establishing feelings of rootedness towards another house. This is true for *Sense and Sensibility*, where we witness the Dashwood women’s moment of dispossession and occupation of the new house, and for Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, who resists the dispossession and lack of security that characterises her life at her uncle’s house through the occupation of the East room.

In *Persuasion*, a similar dispossession takes place, but the novel emphasises Anne's establishment of a sense of rootedness not through the occupation of a particular space, but through the establishment of relationships to a particular set of people. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth and Jane react against an imminent dispossession, rather than one that has already taken place, by managing the family's relationships with other people. In *Emma*, we have in Mrs. Bates a character who has previously faced dispossession and displacement, and who resists it by maintaining close relationships with the people at Highbury, so as to preserve her sense of rootedness to the town. The heroine herself is not threatened by dispossession or even the threat of it, but her feelings of security towards her life at Highbury are also dependent on the relationships she establishes with her neighbours.

Despite this, criticism on the portrayal of single women in Austen's novels has tended to focus on the ways in which she represents the difficulties of the position of single women, as well as the reasons why this condition was regarded as undesirable and even abhorrent. William Baker, for example, declares that "[t]he letters to her niece Fanny Knight contain advice on marriage and the vulnerability of single women – a major theme and concern of Jane Austen's novels" (133). The same is true of the recent article by Breanna Neubauer, "The Old Maid: Jane Austen and Her S(p)i(n)sters," in which she argues that "spinsterhood was considered a daunting fate for gentry-class single women" and that "[o]ne of the most well-known observers of this facet of this time period's society was Jane Austen" (125). Even Johnson, who has attributed to Austen's novels an emancipatory character, argues that they present marriage "as the only purpose in life for women," which she describes as "a failure of the imagination" on Austen's part (98). However, in making that point, Johnson overlooks the considerable number of moments in Austen's novels in which she portrays her heroines not thinking of their future lives in the house of the prospective husband, but simply inhabiting their father's or mother's house. As Edward Copeland explains, *Sense and Sensibility* contains several of these moments, as "[i]n the move from the letters of *Elinor and Marianne* to authorial narration of the published novel ... a surprising surplus of realistic domestic detail, customarily in epistolary fiction, survives from its first version" (xlv). The link that Austen establishes in these episodes between the decoration of the domestic space and the experience of living resists the marriage plot. These episodes also play a crucial role in Austen's portrayal of a sense of rootedness and contentment in their single condition for her female characters. This

creative decision of Austen's expresses her intention of depicting the ways in which single women occupy the space in which they live and transform it. In short, Austen shows the way these women are living – or the way in which they are at home. It is precisely this insight into the everyday of Austen's female characters that, as Deidre Lynch argues, “cue[s] the audience to their own desire to be permanent residents of the real-life equivalents of those scenes” (187). And yet, these scenes also cue female readers to surpass the limitations of the law and assert feelings of ownership over property themselves.

In this sense, Austen can be said to present a purpose for female decorative work, but one that is very different from that presented by non-fictional and other fictional texts of the period. As we have seen, in *The Warren Family*, decoration is something that is commendable and generally harmless as long as it does not result in the woman straying from the performance of her duty towards the other members of the family. Other fictional works, despite being less heavily didactic than *The Warren Family*, also place a greater emphasis in what decoration should *not* be used for, rather than the enabling ways in which it could be used by women. Ferrier's *Marriage*, for example, indicates that the description of the apartments decorated by Lady Lindore are meant as a teachable moment both for the character of Lady Juliana and the reader:

Those of Lady Lindore presented a picture not less striking, could her thoughtless successor have profited by the lesson they offered. Here was all that the most capricious fancy, the most boundless extravagance, the most refined luxury, could wish for or suggest. The bed-chamber, the dressing-room, and boudoir, were each fitted up in a style that seemed rather suited for the pleasures of an Eastern sultana, or Grecian courtesan, than for the domestic comfort of a British matron. (151)

In indicating that these rooms are decorated in a style that is more fitting “for the pleasures of an eastern sultana, or Grecian courtesan,” Ferrier is criticising the previous aristocratic mode of female excellence that encouraged the display of women's bodies. The use of the expressions “the most boundless extravagance” and “the most refined luxury” can also be seen as a condemnation of any system of female education that does not teach women how to manage the family's money responsibly and live within their means. This criticism is also conveyed through the plot, as the

reason Lady Juliana is given access to Lady Lindore's old rooms is that the latter ran away with her lover, leaving her husband with thousands of pounds in debts.

Another scene in *Marriage* presents a criticism of the use of female decorative work as a form of exhibitionism:

"Most girls of Mary's time of life, that ever I had anything to do with," replied Jacky, with a certain wave of the head, peculiar to sensible women, "had something to shew before her age. Bella had worked the globe long before she was sixteen; and Babby did her filagree tea caddy the first quarter she was at Miss Macgowk's," glancing with triumph from the one which hung in a gilt frame over the mantel-piece, to the other which stood on the tea table, shrouded in a green bag.

"And to be sure," rejoined Grizzy, "although Betsy's screen did cost a great deal of money – that can't be denied; and her father certainly grudged it very much at the time – there's no doubt of that; yet certainly it does her the greatest credit, and it is a great satisfaction to us all to have these things to shew." (161)

The repetition of the word "shew" emphasises the characters' belief that the only benefit that decorative work brings to a woman is to provide her with an opportunity to exhibit her talents. Since the decorative objects can be seen as an extension of the woman herself, as indicated by Schaffer, this scene arguably represents another condemnation of the use of decorative work as simply a means of display, the same aspect that Wollstonecraft and More criticised in accomplishments. The indication that one of the decorative pieces cost "a great deal of money" also reflects the same fear of luxury as the previous excerpt, as well as a reproof of thoughtless consumption.

Nevertheless, other contemporary authors of fiction depicted female characters using decoration to resist dispossession and displacement, as well as express their identity. This is the case with a heroine from a novel read by Austen: Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy*, published in 1807.¹⁷ This novel contains two instances in which Corinne's decorations of the domestic space of her house are described: "The view of the Tiger enhanced the beauty of the house, and its interior was elegantly decorated

¹⁷ Austen mentions *Corinne* in her letter to her sister Cassandra on the 27th to 28th December 1808: "I recommended him to read Corinna" (Le Faye, *Letters* 167).

in the most perfect taste. The drawing room was adorned with plaster copies of Italy's finest statues ... but in Corinne's personal sitting room could be seen musical instruments, books, and furniture which was simple but comfortable" (37). This passage emphasises the ways in which Corinne's decoration of the house expresses not only her taste, which is described as impeccable, but also her interests. Indeed, the objects described are illustrative of the multiple ways in which Corinne occupies her time, of her thirst for knowledge and her artistic abilities. These are all consistent with the portrayal of Corinne as an intellectual and an artist which is put forward by the novel. The second description of Corinne's house also emphasises the way in which the decoration is expressive of her identity, this time not by focusing on particular objects but more on its general appearance: "Corinne's house was delightful. It was decorated with the elegance of modern taste, and yet in it could be felt the charm of an imagination which enjoys the beauty of antiquity. Noticeable here was an unusual understanding of happiness, in the highest meaning of the word, that is to say, placing it in everything that ennobles the soul, stimulates thought, and animates talent" (149). Once again, Corinne's home is described as a space in which she has expressed her identity through decoration. Her decorations thus manifest her interest in both the modern and the ancient, as well as all of her intellectual pursuits and interests. Significantly, this space can also be seen as representative of Corinne's resistance towards the displacement of which she has been a victim. Indeed, forced to leave first Italy and then England because she did not fit into the society there, Corinne returns to Italy, where she is finally allowed to pursue her intellectual and artistic interests. One of the ways in which she does this is through the decoration of her home, which also allows her to create a sense of rootedness to the place in which she lives.

Another character from a contemporary novel who resists not just displacement but also dispossession through the decoration of a space is Mary in Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). In this short novel, Mary becomes an heiress after the death of her brother, but is immediately forced to marry a friend of her father's, thereby losing control over her fortune before she ever gets the chance to enjoy it. She then becomes estranged from her husband, as he leaves for the continent on the very same day of the wedding, and Mary herself goes abroad as an attempt to save her friend's health. After her friend's death and her establishment of an attachment to another man, Mary returns to England and her first stop is the house of her friend's mother. As soon as she arrives there, Mary, to her hostess's surprise, gives several indications that she has no

intention of leaving: “She had hitherto treated her with the greatest respect, and concealed her wonder at Mary’s choosing a remote room in the house near the garden, and ordering some alterations to be made, as if she intended living in it” (46). Mary does indeed intend to live there, something which is indicated by the way she occupies and decorates the space in order to assert her feelings of ownership over it. “Choosing” is indicative of physical occupation, of Mary’s act of claiming ownership over the space, whereas “ordering alterations” refers to the decorative efforts through which she personalises the space. Wollstonecraft thus shows how a woman is able to create a sense of rootedness towards the place where she lives by expressing her identity through decoration. Forced to leave her home country and robbed of her fortune, Mary reacts to her dispossession, displacement and consequent loss of a sense of identity by exerting ownership over a space, despite her lack of a legal ownership over it. As I will demonstrate, this poses various similarities to the circumstances of the Dashwood women upon arriving at Barton cottage in *Sense and Sensibility*.

In her introduction to *Sense and Sensibility*, Margaret Doody states that the novel is demonstrative of Austen’s interest in the insecure situation of single women left with a reduced income that makes the maintenance of their genteel status arduous. As Doody explains, Austen was very much aware of the dispossession that she, her mother and her sister would be forced to suffer after her father’s death: “Jane Austen is very interested in the condition of females who are subjected to the loss of home. As a clergyman’s daughter, she knew that her home depended only on her father’s life; once he died ... she and her mother and sister would be dependent on the generosity of her brothers” (ix). Yet, in *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwood women not only have to face restraints that Austen herself was familiar with, but also others that would affect her later in life and whose occurrence she could not possibly have predicted. In fact, as has been mentioned, in 1817, the year of Austen’s death, her uncle Leigh-Perrot died, leaving his entire fortune to his wife. Upon her death, the entirety of the money would go to Austen’s brother, James, except for £1000 that would be given to each of the other Austens. This is exactly the same amount that the Dashwood women are left by “the old gentleman” after he dies, everything else going to their brother, John Dashwood. This is interesting, as the publication of *Sense and Sensibility* predates Leigh-Perrot’s will by six years, so it would not have been possible for Austen to have predicted the consequences of something which increased the severity of her illness and potentially rushed her death. In the novel, therefore, Austen shows an awareness

of the effects a decision such as this can have on a woman's life before it ever happened to her.

Doody goes on to argue that "Much discussion of the novel has centred upon the relative merits or demerits of its two leading female characters, Elinor and Marianne," but that not enough attention has been placed on the presentation of the two sisters as being "equally constricted and abused by an unjust property system" (xi). For this reason, Doody insists, "Those first chapters are not to be hurried over while we try to get to the 'love story'" (xi). While this point is certainly salient, an inattentive reading of the initial chapters of the novels – as well as others further on – will look over an aspect that has been far more neglected in Austen criticism: the ways in which the Dashwood women negotiate their new situation. Arguably more fascinating than Austen's understanding of the precariousness of the condition of single women is the way in which she allows her female characters to overturn the constraints forced upon them and create a sense of ownership towards the houses in which they live. This is done through the inclusion of scenes in the novel that add very little to the development of the plot, but that portray single women simply living, or being at home. Indeed, the two following sections will aim to answer the question: what it is like for a single woman to be at home in Austen's novels?

Sense and Sensibility opens with the information that "The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex" (3) therefore indicating the sense of rootedness that attaches the family to that particular location. The second sentence of the novel reinforces this idea: "Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance" (3). This sentence expresses the family's high social standing through the description of the vastness of the land they own ("Their estate was large") and the indication that the family has held control over it for a long period of time ("for many generations"). This opening establishes a connection between the creation of a sense of rootedness to a place and sociability: "the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance" (3). Furthermore, as Doody affirms, this opening is ironic, as the property ownership described is the prerogative of the male heirs of the family, the women that the novel centres on being barred from it (xiii). With this opening paragraph, Austen begins to demonstrate that feelings of ownership are irrespective of the dictates of property law. In fact, while the Dashwood women live in Norland for a

presumably considerable – although unspecified – number of years, in only one of them is their father the actual owner of the property. The “too melancholy a disposition” and the feelings of “dejection” that they experience upon leaving Norland indicate that before the beginning of that year the Dashwood women had already established feelings of ownership towards the house.

This moment, therefore, constitutes an example of what Wynne has described as “painful moments of realisation of women’s dispossessed state [that punctuated] nineteenth-century novels” as, for the very first time, the feelings of ownership that the Dashwood women have established towards Norland are challenged (9). The process of dispossession that the Dashwood women go through is exacerbated by the treatment they receive from their brother and his wife. Indeed, an important aspect of the characterisation of the John Dashwoods is that they do not resent the Dashwood women for taking with them portable property from Norland. That property remains in the house, and is inherited by John Dashwood, as Mr. Dashwood only had a life interest in Norland. When Fanny Dashwood complains that “the set of breakfast china is twice as handsome as what belongs to this house,” she is referring to portable property that the Dashwoods brought from Stanhill, the house they inhabited before they came to Norland. Fanny Dashwood’s declaration that Mr. Dashwood “thought only of *them* [the Dashwood women]” (11) by bestowing upon his wife the only set of portable property he could legally leave her reveals her to be the epitome of avarice and unfeelingness. Fanny also exaggerates the extent of Mrs. Dashwood’s portable property by saying that “Her house will be therefore almost completely fitted up as soon as she takes it” (10). In reality, it is also from Fanny that we find out that the furniture from Stanhill was sold upon the family leaving the property, and that Mrs. Dashwood has only inherited some china, plate and linen (10). Besides this, the only property the Dashwood women own is books and Marianne’s pianoforte (20). The property at Barton comes fully furnished, however, which means that, much like Fanny in the East Room, the Dashwood women create a personalised space through the appropriation of portable property that was originally not theirs for their own personal use.

Chapter six opens with Austen vividly describing the Dashwood women’s arrival at their new house. The description begins with their entrance into the confines of the county (“their interest in the appearance of a country which they were to inhabit”), followed by the land belonging to Sir John’s estate, upon which Barton cottage sits (“a

view of Barton Valley as they entered it”) and the first sighting of the house itself: “After winding along it for more than a mile, they reached their own house” (22). Austen then details the progressive approach to the house and the entrance through the gate: “A small green court was the whole of its demesne in front; and a neat wicket gate admitted them into it” (22). The sentences that follow contain a description of the interior of the house and the layout of its rooms. There is irony in the mention of the “demesne” of the house, as the term refers to the “extent of land, estate,” being “usually applied to more extensive properties” (305). The new house is thus unfavourably compared to the one the Dashwood women have left behind, being “In comparison to Norland ... poor and small indeed” (22). Austen’s use of free indirect speech in this instance expresses the disappointment the Dashwood women feel upon seeing the cottage for the first time, and works as a reminder of the reduction in their circumstances. Despite this, however, as I demonstrated earlier, this thought is succeeded by an expression of their resistance to their dispossession: “but the tears which recollection called forth as they entered the house were soon dried away” (22). Once the Dashwood women are inside the cottage, Austen offers a portrayal of its surroundings as seen through one of its windows: “The situation of the house was good. High hills rose immediately behind, and at no great distance on each side; some of which were open downs, the others cultivated and woody. The village of Barton was chiefly on one of these hills, and formed a pleasant view from the cottage windows” (22). By representing the cottage’s surroundings in this way, Austen thus establishes the same connection between the domestic interior and sociability that characterises the way in which some of her readers imagine her writing process.

In the following chapter, Austen uses the same technique of allowing the reader to visualise the physical progress of the characters from distance to proximity to a particular house. This time what is being described is Barton Park, the house of the Dashwood women’s new neighbours, as well as the walk that the women make from the cottage towards it:

Barton Park was about half a mile from the cottage. The ladies had passed near it in their way along the valley, but it was screened from their view at home by the protection of a hill. The house was large and handsome; and the Middletons lived in a style of equal hospitality and elegance. The former was Sir John’s gratification, the latter for that of his lady. (25)

First we are provided with a description of Sir John's estate, Barton Park, then of the house in which he and his wife live, and finally a description of the couple. The last two sentences of this extract contain three sets of two words joined together: "large and handsome," "hospitality and elegance," "[Sir John] ... his lady." The first words in the first two sets are associated with Sir John ("large," "hospitality"), whereas the second ones are associated with Lady Middleton ("handsome," "elegance"). "Large" is a reference to the size of Sir John's house and property in general. The link established between this word and "hospitality" is a reference to ideas of obligation of sociability. As the master of a great house and the person with the highest social standing in his community, society would expect Sir John to act in accordance to this role. This would entail a welcoming and generous attitude towards his neighbours and a sharing of his wealth. Sir John fulfils these expectations, as he regularly organises balls and other kinds of social gatherings for his neighbours and often invites people over for dinner at his house. As the novel informs us, the couple is always busy with their "[c]ontinual engagements at home and abroad" (25). On the other hand, the words "handsome" and "elegance" are attributed to Lady Middleton. "Handsome" refers to the aesthetic aspect of the house, whereas "elegance" refers simultaneously to Lady Middleton's decorations of the house, to her conduct and to her body. The coupling of these two terms thus establishes a link between the house and its appearance and Lady Middleton's appearance and morality. This is the same connection established in other novels by Austen, as well as several contemporary texts, both fictional and non-fictional, as I showed in the previous chapter.

However, at this point in the novel the reader is already aware that the attribution of these terms to Sir John and Lady Middleton is ironic. In the previous chapter, Austen characterises Sir John as impertinent, as his "entreaties" with the Dashwood women "were carried to a point of perseverance beyond civility" (23) and Lady Middleton as a vacuous and unapproachable person: "reserved, cold, and had nothing to say for herself beyond the most common-place inquiry" (24). When, in the following page, the couple is described by the narrator as hospitable and elegant, the reader is not supposed to take this literally. The couple's description as possessing "a total want of talent and taste" in the first paragraph of chapter seven should, therefore, not come as a surprise. The beginning of the second paragraph also contributes to the ironic tone Austen is trying to convey: "Lady Middleton piqued herself upon the

elegance of her table, and of all her domestic arrangements, and from this kind of vanity was her greatest enjoyment in any of their parties” (25). The words “Elegance of her table” and “domestic arrangements” imply the presence of good management and taste, both of which, as the previous paragraph has established, Lady Middleton lacks. The repetition of the word “elegance” here indicates that its use is ironic. Furthermore, “elegant” is a word commonly used by Austen to convey the absence of a meaningful or truly commendable personality trait. In *Emma*, for example, after the heroine meets Mr. Elton’s new wife, she escapes the various enquiries from her neighbours at Highbury about her opinion of her by using vacuous terms to describe her: “Emma would not allow herself entirely to form an opinion of the lady, and on no account to give one, beyond the nothing-meaning terms of being ‘elegantly dressed, and very pleasing’” (211). In the same way that the most approving comment Emma can make about Mrs. Elton is the intentionally vacuous compliment that she is “elegantly dressed,” the most commendatory piece of characterisation the narrator is able to offer about Lady Middleton is that “her table and all of her domestic arrangements” are “elegant” (25). This description, as well as the declaration that “vanity” for her decorations is “the greatest enjoyment” that Lady Middleton takes out of a social gathering, characterises her as someone who is too focused on being seen, which fits with the superficial personality attributed to her further along in the novel.

The ironic tone continues throughout the rest of the paragraph with the description of Sir John’s personality, but this section also introduces a slightly sinister layer to his characterisation:

But Sir John’s satisfaction in society was much more real; he delighted in collecting about him more young people than his house would hold, and the noisier they were the better he was pleased. He was a blessing to all the juvenile part of the neighbourhood; for in summer he was for ever forming parties to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors, and in winter his private balls were numerous enough for any young lady who was not suffering under the insatiable appetite of fifteen. (25)

The representation of Sir John’s interests as “much more real” than those of his wife is strikingly ironic: they are not “more real” because less feigned or less superficial, but

because they involve actual human beings as opposed to objects. Indeed, Lady Middleton is described as taking pleasure from the decoration of her house, which involves the collection and organisation of objects in a unique manner in the rooms of her house. Sir John, on the other hand, enjoys “collecting” people and arranging them “about him.” In the same way that his wife uses objects to decorate her house, Sir John uses people, which makes it far more disquieting. Despite this, he is still considered “a blessing” to the young people in the neighbourhood, as by allowing themselves to be “collected,” they receive the benefit of being invited to social events all throughout the year.

This characterisation of the couple can also be seen as Austen’s parody of the prejudice that the occupations of gentlemen were more consequential than those of gentlewomen. According to Vickery, such a prejudice is thoroughly unfounded:

The assumed worth of women’s ornamental projects suffers by an implied comparison with men’s sturdy public employments, yet the practices of noble, gently and genteel women were not dissimilar to those of English gentlemen who lived quietly on their inheritance pursuing a range of interests: collecting, horticulture, botany, philosophy and literature. Some crafts were occasionally pursued by ladies and gentlemen together, or side by side, like his collecting and her shellwork. It is quite wrong to suppose that privileged women filled their empty lives with decorative nonsense while their menfolk put away such things. Active leisure was ever the mark of the gentleman. (*Behind Closed Doors* 253)

The lifestyles of both men and women of the genteel classes, therefore, were characterised by the occupation of leisure time with activities such as collecting. This demonstrates, as Vickery argues, that the idea that genteel women, because they were bound to the domestic space, filled their time with domestic and decorative work, whereas men did not care for such activities and instead spent all of their time outside of the house, is fallacious. In accordance to this, both Sir John and Lady Middleton are described as possessing a “total want of talent and taste which confined their employments ... within a very narrow compass” (25). The previously mentioned use of the three pairs of words in their characterisation is intended to portray them as complementing each other, as Lady Middleton prepares the decoration of the house for social gatherings while Sir John establishes the relationships with their neighbours

and issues the invitations. However, this too is ironic since, as the mistress of the house, particularly the largest one in the neighbourhood, Lady Middleton would have been expected to wish to contribute to the welfare of her neighbours and establish relationships with them as well. Instead, her only interest in social gatherings is that they constitute an opportunity for her to exhibit her wealth.

In the following paragraph, Austen offers a lengthier representation of Sir John's habits of "collecting":

The arrival of a new family in the country was always a matter of joy to him, and in every point of view he was charmed with the inhabitants he had now procured for his cottage at Barton. The Miss Dashwoods were young, pretty, and unaffected. It was enough to secure his good opinion; for to be unaffected was all that a pretty girl could want to make her mind as captivating as her person. The friendliness of his disposition made him happy in accommodating those, whose situation might be considered, in comparison with the past, as unfortunate. In showing kindness to his cousins therefore he had the real satisfaction of a good heart; and in settling a family of females only in his cottage, he had all the satisfaction of a sportsman; for a sportsman, though he esteems only those of his sex who are sportsmen likewise, is not often desirous of encouraging their taste by admitting them to a residence within his own manor.

(25)

Here, there is a shift in perspective from the narrator to Sir John, which is expressed through free indirect speech. This is particularly clear in the declaration "for to be unaffected was all that a pretty girl could want to make her mind as captivating as her person," as this is plainly Sir John's own opinion on the matter. The disquieting aspect of Sir John's "collecting" is emphasised through the use of the word "procured" to refer to the Dashwood women. In describing him as having "procured" "a family of females only" "for his cottage at Barton," Austen characterises Sir John as a sort of landscape artist, who "collects" a particular kind of objects – in this case, young women – that he proceeds to arrange in the landscape of his estate. Moreover, in the same way that his wife takes pride in her "domestic arrangements," and her decorations of the various rooms of the house, Sir John is said to have "all the satisfaction" in his decorations of his house ("collecting about him more young people than his house

would hold”) and in the rest of his estate. Much like his wife, he is characterised as a decorator, whose “arrangements” are unique, because he personally “collects” the particular kind of objects that will make part of it and organises them in the space in whatever way is the most aesthetically pleasing to him and contributes the most to his “enjoyment” and “vanity.” Through the portrayal of Sir John and Lady Middleton’s occupation of the space in which they live, therefore, Austen makes evident the connection between the domestic space of the house and sociability. Austen also establishes interesting juxtapositions between the decorative work of the couple – motivated by vanity and a search for personal entertainment – and that undertaken by the Dashwood women.

The indication that Sir John has “procured” the Dashwood women arguably takes agency away from them. Their description as “those, whose situation might be considered, in comparison with the past, as unfortunate,” much like the previously mentioned establishment of an unfavourable comparison between Barton cottage and Norland places emphasis on what they have left behind. The situation of the Dashwood women is therefore not characterised as pitiable because of what they currently possess but because of the extent and significance of what has been taken away from them. Nevertheless, upon arriving at Barton cottage, the Dashwood women fight this feeling of dispossession through the decoration of their new house. Domestic work is, therefore, not presented by Austen as an acceptance of their subordination, as Kaplan argues, but as a way for the women to oppose the restraints that have been placed on them. As Joanne Hollows explains, some critics have argued in favour of the idea that domestic work can be enabling for women. An example of this would be Sharon Harley, who affirmed that through the “investment on domesticity” after the abolition of slavery, African-American women “claimed domestic work as their source of identity and self-worth” (407). As Hollows states, “This suggests that, far from being uniformly oppressive for all women, domesticity can operate as a resource to respond to other modes of inequality and resist class and racial positioning” (407). In the case of Austen’s novels, she represents dedication to domestic work as a means for single, dispossessed women to resist the inequality that is imposed on them by the law. Austen intimates that, upon arriving at Barton cottage, the Dashwood women’s taking control over the space of the house after being forced to leave their previous home is a form of resistance.

However, the way in which Mrs. Dashwood envisions her occupation of the space of Barton cottage is very different from that of her daughters. Even though as the matriarch of the family she would reasonably have been expected to set the example for her daughters, Mrs. Dashwood is the one who struggles the most with their reduction of circumstances. Considering that “her former style of life rendered many additions to the [the furniture of the house] indispensable,” by resorting to her “ready money” she purchases “all that was wanted of greater elegance to the apartments” (23). Not satisfied with this, she longs for the spring, at which time she believes she will possess “plenty of money” (23) and, with it, the ability to pay for building works in the cottage, with the view of enlarging it. Austen uses the word “improvements” ironically here, since the alterations Mrs. Dashwood has in mind cannot be considered as such: they are large structural changes that would modify the property to the point that it would not be recognisable. Indeed, if she followed up on all of her plans of adding a new drawing-room, a bed-chamber and a garret, widening the staircase and enlarging the parlours, the property would be far from being “a very snug little cottage” (23) as she says, it would hardly be a cottage anymore. And yet, Mrs. Dashwood’s motivation for wanting to take on all of these alterations to the house contribute to her favourable portrayal, rather than the opposite: “These parlours are both too small for such parties of our friends as I hope to see often collected here” (23). Unlike Lady Middleton, whose motivation for decorating is showing off the decorations and expensive food that her money can buy to guests she does not care about, Mrs. Dashwood’s is to be able to welcome friends into her house. This also makes her worthy of pity, as it is revealing of her difficulty in accepting that she is no longer the mistress of a large estate, which means that her time of organising receptions for large numbers of guests is over.

More focused on the present time and resolute in making the best of their current situation, Elinor and Margaret dedicate themselves to decorating the house with their portable property:

In the mean time, till all these alterations could be made from the savings of an income of five hundred a-year by a woman who never saved in her life, they were wise enough to be contented with the house as it was; and each of them was busy in arranging their particular concerns, and endeavouring, by placing around them their books and other possessions, to form themselves a home.

Marianne's pianoforte was unpacked and properly disposed of; and Elinor's drawings were affixed to the walls of their sitting room.

In such employments as these they were interrupted soon after breakfast the next day by the entrance of their landlord. (23)

This section of the novel establishes a contrast between Mrs. Dashwood's desired alterations to the house, which constitute a denial of her new situation, and the ones undergone by her daughters, which can actually be termed improvements, as they imply no structural changes to the house but simply the decoration of its interior. Austen's choice of the expression "to form themselves a home" is significant. "Form" encompasses ideas of organisation, shaping and building of a space, characterising the Dashwood women as creators of spaces. "Themselves" implies the personalised aspect of the space, as the choices they make in its decoration constitute expressions of their identity. Through this expression Austen also conveys that this decorative work is something that they do for their own benefit, and that results in the creation of a space that they see as belonging to them. Johnson's *Dictionary* describes the concept of "home" as "country, place of constant residence," thus placing emphasis on the idea of permanence. Austen's use of the word "home" here, then, contributes to the depiction of the creation of a space that is a reflection of one's identity and that feels permanent. "Arranging" and "placing around" are used to give a sense of an organisation of objects in space. The use of the personal pronoun "their" is expressive of the personalised aspect of this organisation, since its dependence on the taste and ingenuity of a particular person makes it unique and, consequently, expressive of their identity. This is in accordance with the idea of identity as individuality, as a set of experiences, personality, interests and abilities that distinguish someone from everyone else. By indicating that each of the Dashwood women creates a particular space that no one else could have created, Austen shows them expressing their unique identities.

Johnson defined identity concisely as "[s]ameness; not diversity." David Hume's definition, although more comprehensive, also expresses an idea of continuity: "We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that identity or sameness" (165). This concept of identity is also at stake here, since the decoration of Barton cottage conveys the idea that its creator is the same "at all times or in all circumstances," therefore presenting the identity of the Dashwood women as intact and unchanged even though

their circumstances are altered. Austen's choice of the word "concern" is also an interesting one, as, according to *OED*, it is a rare usage of the term that means "[t]hings that belong to one; belongings." The use of this term thus asserts the relationship of ownership between the Dashwood women and the objects which they use to decorate Barton cottage and, consequently, establish feelings of ownership towards it. It is important to emphasise that although in the end the Dashwood women are "contented with the house as it was," that does not undermine their ability to establish feelings towards it through decoration. Indeed, Elinor and Marianne, unlike their mother, may have accepted that their circumstances have changed and that their house and expenses attached to it must match their new style of living, but not that Barton cottage is not theirs. Instead, through her description of the occupation of the cottage, she illustrates the ways in which the decoration of the space one inhabits is conducive to the development of feelings of ownership and rootedness towards it.

In her depiction of the process of establishing such feelings towards the place where a woman lives, Austen places special attention on a particular form of portable property, both in *Sense and Sensibility* and in her other novels: that which is made by the women themselves. In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, it is Elinor's drawings and fire screens, the first being used to decorate the space of Barton cottage, and the second as a present to her sister-in-law, Fanny. Both, in their own way, are a means for Elinor to create a sense of rootedness for herself. The fact that these objects are Elinor's own creation is significant since, as Vickery explains, such objects were generally regarded as a woman's inalienable property:

Women's crafts were productions of supreme individuality. Handworks were individual and personal in material, aesthetic, customary and even in legal terms. Raw materials were worked upon to produce something literally unique, and even shop-bought kits were virtually never assembled in exactly the same way. Drawing and design, selection of colour and adaptation of patterns all manufactured an aesthetic display that was personal. "My own work" was a routine identification made by female victims of theft. (*Behind Closed Doors* 253-254)

A woman's creation of a decorative object is the result of the use of her taste, talents and ingenuity and, as such, constitutes an expression of her identity, or even, as

Schaffer affirms, an extension of herself. As such, the object becomes so intimately connected with the woman to the point that it becomes inalienable. This is illustrated by Vickery through the example of Sarah, the Duchess of Marlborough who, whilst in a property dispute with her grandson, defended her entitlement to some of her portable property by emphasising that it was of her own creation: “A white Indian Stitched Bed made with fringe which is the Duchess of Marlbro’s own Work & therefore is hers” (254). In decorating Barton cottage with her drawings, therefore, Elinor does not simply claim her right over them but over the house itself. Indeed, by decorating the cottage with objects that are expressive of her identity and extensions of herself, Elinor leaves her unique mark in the place in which she lives and, in doing so, claims it for herself.

Mansfield Park is another novel in which Austen portrays a single woman establishing feelings of ownership and rootedness towards the place in which she lives by decorating it. Fanny faces obstacles in her attempts at feeling at home in Mansfield Park from the moment she enters the house, as its grandeur strikes her as terrifying: “The grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease: whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry” (12). This extract thus expresses the process of displacement that Fanny goes through after she is forced to leave her parents’ house and move to Mansfield Park. After years of learning to adapt to the life there, Fanny’s development of any feelings of ownership towards the house are further hampered by the family not acknowledging it as her home. Indeed, Lady Bertram goes as far as to say that “It can make very little difference to you, whether you are in one house or the other” (20). Fanny is also characterised as lacking control over her own body and use of her time to a greater degree than any other heroine in Austen’s novels.

Nevertheless, Fanny resists the precarious situation in which she has been placed, as well as the consequent lack of security, by claiming the East room for herself:

The room had then become useless, and for some time was quite deserted, except for Fanny, when she visited her plants, or wanted one of the books, which she was still glad to keep there, from the deficiency of space and accommodation in her little chamber above; but gradually, as her value for the comforts of it increased, she had added to her possessions, and spent more of her time there;

and having nothing to oppose her, had so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into it, that it was now generally admitted to be her's. (118-119)

Austen describes Fanny's occupation of the East Room through the curious expression "so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into it." "Worked herself" suggests labour, but also works here as a synonym for insinuating, which implies a maneuvering on Fanny's part, a series of movements requiring skill and care; skill, because in the occupation and decoration of the room Fanny resorts to her ingenuity, and care due to her generally precarious and low position in the family. The words "naturally" and "artlessly," however, convey the idea that the occupation was done effortlessly, and that Fanny faced no opposition from the rest of the family. This is reinforced in the following sentence, which states that the family considered this occupation to be "entirely reasonable" (119).

Fanny's feelings of ownership towards the room are, as this excerpt indicates, legitimised by other people acknowledging it as hers. Furthermore, through her particular choice of words in the description of Fanny's occupation of the East Room, Austen presents the space as Fanny's, thereby further legitimising her ownership of it:

The comfort of it in her hours of leisure was extreme. She could go there after any thing unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand. – Her plants, her books – of which she had been a collector, from the first hour of her commanding a shilling – her writing desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity, were all within her reach; – or if indisposed for employment, if nothing but musing would do, she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it. (119)

Here, Austen indicates that the physical occupation of space, the appropriation of objects for her own use and the personalised organisation of them, which constitutes Fanny's decoration of the room, is all that is necessary to constitute ownership. This is expressed through the use of possessive pronouns, which present Fanny as the owner of the decorative objects: "her plants, her books," "her writing-desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity." The use of the word "collector" to describe Fanny also presents her as the legitimate owner of these objects. Much like Elinor with Barton cottage,

Fanny decorates the room with objects of her own creation (“her works of ... ingenuity”), which function as extensions of herself. And like the Dashwood women with the furniture in the cottage, Fanny appropriates portable property that, while not originally hers, becomes her property through this process. These objects gain a different meaning after Fanny appropriates them, since, although none of them are characterised as particularly valuable or interesting, Fanny attributes a sentimental value to them. By her doing so, each object ends up having “an interesting remembrance connected with it.” Even though the East room is mostly made up of objects that “nobody else wanted,” thanks to Fanny’s decorative efforts the transformed space ultimately makes up a harmonious whole (119). Austen’s indication that these objects are unwanted by other people is also significant, as it establishes a link between Fanny and her possessions. Indeed, in several moments in the narrative she is made to feel unwelcome and unwanted both in Mansfield Park and in her parents’ house in Portsmouth. Through the use of these objects, therefore, as well as of those that she acquires (“of which she had been a collector”) according to her taste, Fanny turns the East room into a personalised space that expresses her identity. At the end of the novel, Fanny’s feelings of rootedness towards Mansfield Park are further legitimised by her aunt’s letter, in which she writes: “I trust and hope, and sincerely wish you may never be absent from home so long again” (338). Austen makes it clear that Fanny recognises the symbolic importance of her aunt’s use of the term “home” by writing that she believes that “nothing was more consolatory to her” than her words (338). Until this moment of legitimisation takes place, however, Fanny resists her displacement and creates a sense of security for herself by claiming ownership over the East room.

The creation of a sense of ownership through the decoration of the space in which a woman lives – present both in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* – suggests the potential Austen sees in decoration as a means through which feelings of ownership over a space might be established. This is expressed in one of her letters, in which she describes her brother Edward’s work in the gardens of Chawton House, his property:

Edward is very well, and enjoys himself as thoroughly as any Hampshire-born Austen can desire. Chawton is not thrown away upon him. – He talks of making a new Garden; the present is a bad one & ill situated, near Mr. Papillon’s; – he means to have the new, at the top of the Lawn behind his own house – We like

to have him proving & strengthening his attachment to the place by making it better. (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters* 224)

Austen sees her brother's planning of improvements to his property – in this case with the construction of a new garden – as a way for him to both express and develop his feelings of rootedness to his property in Chawton. Austen's brother exerts ownership over his property by altering it according to his own taste. In her novels, Austen portrays her single heroines doing something very similar with the houses they inhabit: by presenting them transforming and personalising the places in which they live, she shows them asserting their feelings of ownership and creating feelings of rootedness towards them. By establishing this similarity between what her brother does in Chawton and what her characters do in the houses they inhabit, Austen legitimises her female characters' feelings of ownership and presents them as something that is independent from the law.

This is not, however, the only way in which Austen portrays decorative work as a means of feeling rooted in the place one inhabits: in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, gifts are portrayed as possessing interesting symbolic connotations that directly connect the gift to its creator and the domestic space she inhabits. Indeed, the possession of a talent for crafts means that a woman is able to extend the domestic space of the house beyond its four walls, through the offer of a gift. As Schaffer explains, gifts constitute “personal emanations of their producer,” which are “given as sentimental tokens, irreducibly and inalienably part of the private world of the home” (34). And yet, as we have seen in the previous sections, the domestic space of the home cannot be said to be entirely private. This act of offering a craft item in Austen is also very distinct from the demonstration that the woman “never stopped working to improve the domestic abode” explained by Schaffer and, which, as has been demonstrated, has patriarchal connotations. In Austen, the offering of a craft item of a woman's own creation is representative of a woman's role in the maintenance of relationships through which she extends her sense of rootedness beyond the space of the house. As Kaplan affirms, one of the roles that was seen as belonging to women was that of representative of the household, which involved being responsible for maintaining relationships with the other members of the genteel community through visits and the writing of letters. According to Kaplan, these “contacts” were “important because a family had status only as long as it was represented within the community”

(34). However, I will argue that, in her novels, Austen also portrays the management of these relationships as important because it is a vital part of a woman's establishment of a sense of rootedness to the place in which she lives.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, a gift of a craft item is exchanged between Elinor and Fanny, her sister-in-law; Elinor offers her a "very pretty pair of screens" (176) that Fanny uses to decorate her living-room. This gift is evidently representative of the familial connection between these two women. Whilst in this particular case it does not express something as warm as affection, it is a symbol of respect. The gift therefore becomes a reminder of the relationship that binds not just these two people but these two households, as it is a piece of Elinor's household that then becomes part of Fanny's. Through the offer of this gift, Elinor establishes a sense of rootedness for herself that is not just attached to the house in which she lives but also to the family to which she belongs.

Emma contains another example of gift-giving, the difference being that the heroine is far more intimate with the person on whom the present is bestowed. In the following excerpt, Emma introduces the subject of her drawings and Mr. Elton responds by praising the ones which he has seen decorating Mrs. Weston's house:

"You do not know it I dare say, but two or three years ago I had a great passion for taking likenesses, and attempted several of my friends, and was thought to have a tolerable eye in general."

"I know what your drawings are. How could you suppose me ignorant? Is not this room rich in specimens of your landscapes and flowers; and has not Mrs. Weston some inimitable figure-pieces in her drawing-room, at Randalls? (34-35)

When Miss Taylor – now Mrs. Weston – leaves Hartfield, she takes with her a piece of her former home in Emma's drawings. These drawings function, simultaneously, as a symbol of the intimate relationship between Emma and her former governess, an extension of the home that both women shared at Hartfield, and an extension of Emma herself, since, as her creations, they embody her personality, her talents and her taste. Once brought into Mr. Weston's house, they allow Mrs. Weston to create feelings of ownership and belonging towards the new space. By decorating it with objects that are meaningful to her, Mrs. Weston personalises the space of the new house and thus creates a home that is unmistakably her own. To Emma, this link is

also important as, despite the security of her position in Hartfield, the house in which she lives, her relationship to Mrs. Weston is part of what makes her feel rooted in Highbury.

3.4 Solitude and sociability

As we have seen, the term “living” as used in Austen’s novels resists the separation of the private or domestic and the public. Indeed, when used as part of the expression “style of living,” the term refers not just to the management of the domestic space of the house, but also to habits and other expenses related to sociability. “Living” thus becomes a concept that encompasses not just one’s relationship with the domestic space of the house but also with the surrounding neighbourhood in which it is embedded. As Vickery affirms, “By its very nature, sociability resists the categories of public and private, for its very function is to integrate the two” (*Gentleman’s Daughter* 196). Sociability in Austen can also be seen not so much as a link between two distinctly separate spaces but as an aspect of living that demonstrates that there is not a strict separation between them, or that the idea of a strict separation between them is an illusion. The conception I propose of sociability is thus a flexible one, which includes both the space of the home and intimacies that are expressly familial.

It is true that, like Madame de Staël’s Corinne and Wollstonecraft’s Mary – the first a single woman and the second someone who is separated from her husband – the Dashwood women are shown decorating the house for themselves. In both cases, the women do not take a man or their children into consideration in their decorations, and so the patriarchal aspect from *The Warren Family* and some of the conservative conduct books mentioned is absent. However, no human being lives in isolation, and Austen shows that the Dashwood women are no different. As I have argued, the self is always socially situated, and third parties are – or should be – always considered during the process of decorating. This is clear when Austen indicates that the motivation for Mrs. Dashwood’s prospective alterations for the cottage is her wish to welcome as many friends as possible into it. And indeed, after they have decorated the house with the portable property they have brought from Norland, the Dashwood women open it up to their neighbours.

One such occasion is that in which the reader is introduced to Mrs. Palmer, through which Austen demonstrates that she does not consider that third parties should be kept in mind during the decorative process in quite the same way as that indicated by some conduct book authors. In *The Female Instructor; or Young Woman's Companion*, thought to have been published in 1811, for example, the author warns their readers that “[t]he neatness and order of your house and furniture, is a part of economy that will greatly affect your appearance and character” (178). By presenting a woman’s decorations as a reflection of herself, the author thus attempts to prepare the readers for the judgement that, according to them, will be formed of a mistress of a house by her visitors when they observe her decorative efforts. However, the scene in which Mrs. Palmer visits Barton cottage with her family offers a parody of this notion:

“Well! what a delightful room this is! I never saw anything so charming! Only think, mama, how it is improved since I was here last! I always thought it such a sweet place, ma’am!” (turning to Mrs. Dashwood,) “but you have made it so charming! Only look, sister, how delightful everything is! How I should like such a house for myself! Should not you, Mr. Palmer?”

... Mrs. Palmer's eye was now caught by the drawings which hung round the room. She got up to examine them.

“Oh! dear, how beautiful these are! Well, how delightful! Do but look, mama, how sweet! I declare they are quite charming; I could look at them for ever.” And then sitting down again, she very soon forgot that there were any such things in the room. (81-82)

It is true that this scene draws attention to the Dashwood women’s decorative efforts, particularly Elinor’s, as well as Mrs. Palmer’s reaction upon first seeing them. As the matron of the house, the compliments are first directed at Mrs. Dashwood, but subsequently focus is positioned on Elinor’s particular contribution to the decorations through her drawings. Yet, comically, Mrs. Palmer repeats the same adjectives tirelessly in only two short interventions (“delightful” is used three times and so is “charming”), and after briefly looking at the craft items made by Elinor she quickly moves on to doing something else (“she very soon forgot that there were any such things in the room”). The anonymous author of the conduct book *The Mirror of the*

Graces (1811), identified in its cover as “a lady of distinction,” describes the ways in which women are judged based on the decoration of their homes, quoting “a certain author” who declares: “Show me a lady’s dressing-room ... and I will tell you what manner of woman she is” (63). The contrast between Mrs. Palmer and the figure of the visitor that this conduct book, amongst many others, uses as a warning is striking: Mrs. Palmer’s lack of attention and vacuous remarks about the decorations are indicative of her willingness to like the Dashwood women and her lack of concern for what their domestic interior can tell her about them. Her comment about the cottage (“How I should like such a house for myself!”) also exposes the inconsequentiality of her remarks, as it is at best dubious that Mrs. Palmer, who is in a far more comfortable financial situation than the Dashwood women, should envy them their house.

Through this scene, Austen thus presents an alternative reality to those advanced by authors of conduct books such as the two just mentioned: one in which women can feel easy and comfortable in opening their house up to their neighbours. The tranquility of this scene contrasts with the descriptions of Lady Middleton’s receptions, which she sees as an opportunity to show off the wealth of her decorations to her neighbours, this being the only pleasure that she takes from these encounters. Indeed, sociability for the Dashwood women is portrayed throughout the novel as something through which the qualities of the domestic space are progressively extended into the public space. Austen’s descriptions of the gatherings with their neighbours in Barton include adjectives that would usually be associated with domestic spaces: “ease and familiarity” and “increasing intimacy” (40-41). Through the description of these social encounters, therefore, Austen presents sociability as a means through which to extend the qualities of the domestic space into the public space.

As Kaplan argues, genteel women played an important role in the supervision of the family’s concerns, sociability being one of them: “[Women’s] social interactions with friends, neighbours, and kin” played an important part in the “perpetuation of the family’s rank from one generation to another” (33). Kaplan elaborates: “If domesticity was generally conceptualised in opposition to ‘society,’ particularly London or resort-town society, the duality should not blind us to the very sociable lives of the gentry. Their private realm was a good deal more porous, more public than we might imagine” (33). This porousness is particularly visible in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* in which Austen portrays female characters establishing feelings of

rootedness to the place in which they live not through the decoration of the domestic space but through sociability.

Indeed, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet sisters are portrayed engaging in decorative activities (such as trimming a hat and doing needlework), but to a lesser extent than in *Sense and Sensibility*. Throughout the novel, the work the Bennet sisters do *not* do is actually more markedly emphasised, particularly by Mrs. Bennet, who sees it as an important mark of their genteel status. This detail has previously been noticed by Sturrock, who explains it the following way:

Austen establishes that they both [Elizabeth and Jane] are capable of active caring, yet part of the pleasurable “light & bright & sparkling” quality of the novel, of which Austen playfully complains is *Pride and Prejudice*’s comparative lack of concern with “usefulness and exertion.” The sense of the importance of domestic competence and domestic activity to women’s lives is a lesser concern in Austen’s most enduringly popular novel. (64)

However, *Pride and Prejudice* is arguably no less concerned with “usefulness and exertion” within domestic spaces, but simply more focused on the representation of the ways in which sociability blurs the lines between domestic and public spaces.

From the very first pages of *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader accompanies the search for privacy for both Elizabeth and her eldest sister: “When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him” (9). The two sisters are constantly depicted separating themselves from the rest of the family, in search of a place where they can confide in each other. These places of refuge range from the room that the two share – “a glance from Jane invited her to follow her up stairs. When they had gained their own room, Jane taking out the letter, said ...” (89) – to concealed parts of the garden – “The two young ladies were summoned from the shrubbery where this conversation passed” (65). Interestingly, the search for privacy in these two characters is not portrayed as an escape from sociability, but as an opportunity to discuss it. Indeed, in the first excerpt, the two sisters take advantage of the privacy of their room to talk about Mr. Bingley, his sisters and Mr. Darcy after meeting them for the first time. In the second, Elizabeth follows her sister to her room, where they discuss Mr. Bingley’s abrupt decision to leave Netherfield; and in the third they find a

concealed part of the garden, where Elizabeth tells Jane about Wickham's description of his involvement with Mr. Darcy.

There is also a number of episodes in which Elizabeth takes refuge from other people. Whilst visiting Charlotte after her marriage, she takes any suitable opportunity to spend some moments on her own. After the conversation with Colonel Fitzwilliam, in which she finds out about Darcy's part in keeping Bingley and her sister apart, Elizabeth "[shuts herself up] into her own room, as soon as her visitor left them, [so that] she could think without interruption of all that she had heard" (143). In doing so, she has to excuse herself from engagements and face Mr. Collins's "apprehension of Lady Catherine's being rather displeased by her staying at home" (144). Finding privacy, however, is often not an easy task, as she does not always have control over how she spends her time. Much as she longs to be alone, when the Collinses once again visit Lady Catherine, Elizabeth is forced to join them and accept the fact that "Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours" (162). Her "solitary walks" (140) allow her to endure the moments in which she cannot escape social convention and is forced to join her hosts on a visit to Lady Catherine's house: "whenever she was alone, she gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections" (162). Elizabeth's thoughts at this point in the narrative are of such a depth that she feels the need to take refuge by being still.

Once back in her father's house, Elizabeth is only too happy to leave it again for the opportunity of spending time with her aunt and uncle and less with her mother and younger sisters: "Her tour to the Lakes was now the object of her happiest thoughts; it was her best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentedness of her mother and Kitty made inevitable" (181). After her return, Elizabeth continues to incessantly search for privacy, particularly when the family receives the news of Lydia's marriage to Wickham, to Mrs. Bennet's alacrity: "Mrs. Hill began instantly to express her joy. Elizabeth received her congratulations amongst the rest and then, sick of this folly, took refuge in her own room, that she might think with freedom" (233). The use of the expression "that she might think with freedom" is significant. These moments of pause in the narrative, in which Elizabeth feels the need to take refuge in a more secluded place, convey the idea that certain spaces are more conducive to thinking and understanding for her. It is also worth noting that the motivation behind this choice of a more remote space is not always a need to be alone.

In fact, as has been mentioned, Elizabeth is often followed by Jane, and yet this change of space is shown to be as much of a source of comfort as when she is completely alone. This indicates that Elizabeth's ability to think clearly and seriously consider complex thoughts is dependent not on complete isolation, but on separation from certain people. Elizabeth's establishment of a physical distance between herself and her mother and younger sisters is indicative of the differences of character between them. The same principle also applies to her need to separate herself from Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins. All of these characters are described as self-centred and overpowering and, in the case of Mrs. Bennet, Lydia and Kitty, hectic. Any space in which these characters are present cannot be expected to be conducive to moments of pause and deep thought for Elizabeth, and so she is forced to search for an alternative space.

Furthermore, the scenes in which Elizabeth searches for privacy on her own and the ones in which she does it accompanied by her sister have one more thing in common: in both cases the search for privacy is not portrayed as an escape from sociability, but as a way of finding a place conducive to considering how to manage it. Indeed, whilst visiting the Collinses, Elizabeth isolates herself from other people in order to think about Colonel Fitzwilliam's revelation of Mr. Darcy's involvement in the separation of Bingley and her sister; whereas, once in her father's house, she separates herself from her mother and her younger sisters to consider the information that Lydia is to be married to Willoughby. In their solitary moments, Elizabeth and Jane think and talk about their relationships with other people, showing that the interior and exterior, the private and the public spaces are connected by sociability. These private spaces that both characters find are, therefore, presented as spaces in which Elizabeth and Jane are able to consider their relationships and think about how to manage them. For Elizabeth and Jane, even moments of solitude are used for reflecting about sociability and about the family's relationships with the members of the local community. Interestingly, this is true not just for Elizabeth, to whose thoughts we have access, but also for Jane, to whose thoughts we do not.

Throughout the novel, both sisters put themselves forward as representatives of the family and supervisors of the social relationships it maintains with the other genteel members of its community. While it is true that it is Elizabeth who warns her father about the dangers of allowing Lydia to travel to Brighton, Jane also assists her and their father in the management of the family's concerns after the elopement. Furthermore, much like Elizabeth, Jane also takes on the role of supervisor of the

behaviour of the other family members during social events. An example of this kind of involvement on the part of the two sisters is Sir William Lucas's visit to Longbourn after Charlotte's engagement to Mr. Collins. In this excerpt, the behaviour of both Mrs. Bennet and Lydia is described as inappropriate as, by expressing unwavering shock at the news, they fail to welcome Sir Lucas into their home. Lydia is described as "unguarded and often uncivil," whereas Mrs. Bennet is "too much overpowered to say a great deal while Sir William remained" (97). Elizabeth, on the other hand, feels that it is "incumbent on her" to play the role of hostess and "[puts] herself forward," being "readily joined by Jane" (97) in the management of the behaviour of their mother and sisters. Unlike Mrs. Bennet and the youngest Miss Bennets, Elizabeth and Jane realise that their behaviour could have put the family's relationship with the Lucases in jeopardy. By reacting in this way, the two sisters demonstrate that they understand that there cannot be a strict separation between the domestic space of the house and the public space of the neighbourhood, as sociability – in this case, Sir William's visit – erases that clear-cut separation. Their behaviour is, therefore, consistent with what it would have been had this encounter with Sir William taken place outside of their home. Scenes such as this demonstrate that the domestic space in Austen is a space of sociability, of direct contact with the public sphere. Moreover, they also illustrate the ways in which Austen's characters are shown to be aware of the importance of the establishment of relationships with one's neighbours to the creation of a sense of rootedness to the place one inhabits.

The same is true of *Emma*, which features another character of a single woman who creates feelings of ownership and rootedness towards the place where she lives through the establishment and maintenance of relationships towards people in her community: Miss Bates. Indeed, as the daughter of a clergyman, Miss Bates is portrayed as the victim of dispossession and displacement, as both she and her mother lost their home and their main source of income with the death of Mr. Bates. However, instead of living a depressing, retired life that so many believed was the destiny of the unwealthy single woman, Miss Bates is portrayed as not only being content with her situation – with Emma describing her as "satisfied" – but as playing an active role in her community (68). As Richard Cronin and Dorothy Mcmillan argue, Miss Bates is portrayed as preserving "the status of Highbury as a community by accommodating, or seeming to, the whole population of the village within the circle of her acquaintance" (lxxii). This accommodation is done both figuratively and literally.

Indeed, one of Miss Bates's many outpourings on the kindness of her neighbours during her entrance at the ball in the inn evinces her figurative ability of making the entire neighbourhood familiar through her speeches: "How do you do, Mr. Richard? – I saw you the other day as you rode through the town ... Such a host of friends! ... Who can this be? – very likely the worthy Coles. – Upon my soul, this is charming to be standing about among such friends!" (253-254). In just this speech, we find out something about several members of the upper and middle classes at Highbury: Dr. Hughes is a married man, the Otways have two unmarried daughters and Mr. George and Mr. Arthur are presumably two single men. Another way through which Miss Bates helps turn Highbury into an intimate space, where everyone is familiar and connected to one another, is by welcoming a considerable part of its inhabitants into her house, regardless of the prestige of their social position. The Coles, the Westons, Mr. Knightley, Frank Churchill and Emma herself are all described visiting her at some point or other in the novel. Miss Bates may never own her own house, but we are not meant to doubt that she is fully integrated into Highbury and that she has developed feelings of ownership and rootedness towards the place where she lives.

What makes *Persuasion* so original amongst Austen's novels is her decision to depict the heroine being at home not in a place – like the Dashwood sisters with Barton cottage and Elizabeth with Longbourn – but with and because of certain people. Indeed, after suffering from dispossession and displacement through the loss of Kellynch, Anne finds a home amidst the Musgroves. When she arrives at Uppercross, where the Musgroves live, much like the Dashwood women with Barton cottage, Anne resists her dispossession and displacement by making the resolution to exert herself in order to become fully integrated there:

The Mr. Musgroves had their own game to guard, and to destroy; their own horses, dogs, and newspapers to engage them; and the females were fully occupied in all the other common subjects of housekeeping, neighbours, dress, dancing, and music. She acknowledged it to be very fitting, that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse; and hoped, ere long, to become a not unworthy member of the one she was now transplanted into. With the prospect of spending at least two months at Uppercross, it was highly incumbent on her to clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible. (39)

Anne's direct involvement with the concerns of the Musgrove family, who welcome her, and establishment of a close relationship with them, allows her to create feelings of rootedness towards the place in which they live. This development of a sense of rootedness to Uppercross is facilitated by Anne's contentment in her usefulness to the family, particularly during the turbulent period after Louisa's fall: "she had the satisfaction of knowing herself extremely useful there, both as an immediate companion, and as assisting in all those arrangements for the future which, in Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove's distressed state of spirits, would have been difficulties" (99). Disregarded by her father and sister, whilst living with the Musgroves Anne's judgement is solicited and her participation in the family's everyday life is welcomed. The warmth of the Musgroves's reception thus allows Anne to develop feelings of belonging to their family that she is incapable of having towards her own. After the loss of Kellynch and the move to Bath, Anne does not feel that her home is with her father and sister anymore. Her concern for the Musgroves and lack of curiosity about the affairs of her own family are indicative of her emotional detachment from them and, consequently, the house they inhabit in Bath:

The subjects of which her heart had been full on leaving Kellynch, and which she had felt slighted, and been compelled to smother, among the Musgroves, were now become but of secondary interest. She had lately lost sight even of her father and sister and Bath. Their concerns had been sunk under those of Uppercross ... Anne would have been ashamed to have it known how much more she was thinking of Lyme and Louisa Musgrove, and all her acquaintance there; how much more interesting to her was the home and the friendship of the Harvilles and Captain Benwick than her own father's house in Camden Place, or her own sister's intimacy with Mrs. Clay. (101)

Home for Anne becomes something that is not embodied by a particular place, but by particular people, and the feeling of warmth and emotional attachment she has in their company. Comparatively, her father's house can be said to be a gilded cage for Anne: more sumptuous than that of the Musgroves's, but altogether frigid and prison-like, which she enters "with a sinking heart, anticipating an imprisonment of many months" (111).

In contrast to *Sense and Sensibility*, in *Persuasion* Austen indicates that Anne's establishment of a sense of rootedness towards the Musgroves's house is independent of any decorative work on her part. Austen makes this particularly clear in the excerpt which describes Anne's first entrance into the house:

To the Great House accordingly they went, to sit the full half hour in the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor, to which the present daughters of the house were gradually giving the proper air of confusion by a grand piano forte and a harp, flower-stands and little tables placed in every direction. Oh! could the originals of the portraits against the wainscot, could the gentlemen in brown velvet and the ladies in blue satin have seen what was going on, have been conscious of such an overthrow of all order and neatness! The portraits themselves seemed to be staring in astonishment. (37)

Anne's thoughts in this scene express a judgement of what she considers to be the poor taste of Louisa and Henrietta's decorations, described as lacking organisation and simplicity ("order and neatness"). The judgement is conveyed through the expression "staring in astonishment," which presumably would be Anne's own reaction, were she not bound by the rules of politeness. Despite this, however, Austen makes it apparent later in the novel that Anne is at home amongst the Musgroves and that she has been successful in establishing the same feelings of rootedness as the other female characters from Austen's novels. This is particularly patent in the description of a "fine family-piece" composed of the Musgrove family and Anne sitting together around "a Christmas fire":

Immediately surrounding Mrs. Musgrove were the little Harvilles, whom she was sedulously guarding from the tyranny of the two children from the Cottage, expressly arrived to amuse them. On one side was a table occupied by some chattering girls, cutting up silk and gold paper; and on the other were tressels and trays, bending under the weight of brawn and cold pies, where riotous boys were holding high revel; the whole completed by a roaring Christmas fire, which seemed determined to be heard in spite of all the noise of the others. Charles and Mary also came in, of course, during their visit; and Mr. Musgrove made a point of paying his respects to Lady Russell, and sat down close to her for ten minutes,

talking with a very raised voice, but from the clamour of the children on her knees, generally in vain. It was a fine family-piece. (109-110)

Through the use of words that convey loud sounds such as “chattering,” “riotous,” “high revel,” “determined to be heard,” “noise” and “very raised voice,” Austen conveys the openness and familiarity that characterises the gatherings of the Musgrove family circle. The fact that Anne considers this “a fine family-piece,” despite the loud levels of noise that the children make, preventing the adults from being heard, marks her approval of it and her contentment in being part of it. This scene is described by Mrs. Musgrove as “a little quiet cheerfulness at home,” an expression that Anne later remembers and contrasts to the noises of the streets of Bath, which she finds far less pleasant (110). Immediately after arriving in the city, Anne finds herself “[looking] back with fond regret to the bustles of Uppercross,” which again expresses her feelings of rootedness towards the Musgrove family and their home (110). Her wish of returning to Uppercross is indicative of her attachment to the Musgroves and her identification with their way of life, which contrasts to the cold and indifferent treatment that she receives from her family.

Arguably, nowhere else in her novels does Austen paint such an interesting picture of the ways in which a woman can establish feelings of rootedness to a place through sociability as in *Persuasion*. Had Austen ever completed *Sanditon*, it would have been possible to ascertain whether *Persuasion* represented a new way of considering women’s relationship towards property on her part. Nonetheless, as this chapter has shown, Austen’s portrayal of the relationship between single women and houses is consistent, as all of the previously mentioned novels demonstrate that feelings of ownership are irrespective of the dictates of property law and that property for her is first and foremost an affective relationship between a person and a space. By allowing her female characters to establish feelings of ownership towards property they have no possibility of ever owning, Austen thus goes beyond offering a realistic picture of life for single women in her period and legitimises their desires for ownership in a way that is distinctly political. The following chapter will continue to explore the political and emancipatory character of Austen’s representation of her female characters’ different kinds of relationships towards property, but will consider how Austen presents them conceptualising a potential future for themselves not in a house belonging to their parents or another family member, but in that of a prospective husband.

CHAPTER 4: IMAGINING

In Austen's first three novels, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, she portrays her heroines visiting the house of a prospective husband and imagining themselves in the position of mistresses of that house. Here there is a role reversal, as it is the man who is being judged based on his managerial and decorative abilities rather than the woman, with the space of his house being similarly presented as representative of his taste and character. These episodes in the novels are seemingly very similar, as they place the main female character in that situation. Yet, there are significant differences between them, which represent a development in Austen's conception of the role these episodes can play within the novel.

This chapter will continue to develop the idea that, for Austen, affection is a legitimate basis for ownership. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is precisely the precariousness of the lives of Austen's main female characters that makes the representation of their feelings towards property so potent and compelling in all kinds of ways. This chapter shows how Austen explores yet another complex relationship towards property, one that is established by imagining oneself taking possession of a space in a future that may or may not materialise. In doing so, I also reflect on how the format of the novel facilitates Austen's portrayal of the ways in which her female characters become attached to the house of the prospective husband, as well as the emancipatory character of this form of relationship towards property. This chapter, much like the previous ones, will explore how Austen's novels expose ways of thinking about property that would not be legitimised by the law for several decades after her death. As this chapter will show, it is possible to find in non-fictional literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century various expressions of the idea that property was grounded on the imagination, so the idea that a woman could mentally take possession over a space that was legally not hers was not original to Austen's novels. However, through the medium of the fictional text, Austen goes far beyond this idea: she represents the result of this imaginative process as a different kind of ownership, one that is no less real or powerful. In doing so, Austen explores the possibilities that fictional texts offer for the legitimisation of inherently political and radical desires through the representation of the ways in which they play out in a character's imagination. Ultimately, by focusing on Austen's exploration of the concept of "imagining" in her novels, this chapter will aim to answer the question: how

does Austen show the ways in which imagining oneself taking possession over a space in the future enables a woman to establish feelings of ownership and rootedness towards it, notwithstanding her lack of a legal right over it?

4.1 Reading the prospective husband's house

The period in which Austen lived saw a significant growth in domestic tourism, due to various factors. Tourism had become synonymous with acculturation, but the conflicts with France made travelling to the continent too much of a risk (Lamb 130). More attention started to be paid to potential destinations across the United Kingdom, particularly since improvements in the roads meant that travelling was safer and faster than ever before. This led to an increase in the popularity of country-house tourism. Despite the fact that, as Jocelyn Anderson states, “country-house visiting as a concept dates back to the seventeenth-century, there had never been so many tourists, nor such a variety of them” (195). Although gentility and considerable wealth continued to be essential requirements for gaining an entrance, this meant that, for the first time, the list of tourists would have included “not only those who had their own estates but also those who could only be spectators” (195). This increase in the number of tourists led to the introduction of guidebooks which, besides providing information about the country-house, also stipulated the limits of the tourists’ access to it, so as to try to negotiate the tensions between private and public space that characterised it. Before guidebooks, this task belonged to housekeepers, who escorted visitors through the rooms that were open to the public. The pressure to open one’s house to the public was such that, as Anderson affirms, “the willingness to welcome tourists to one’s house became a defining characteristic of the polite landowner” (196). In spite of this, the maintenance of the private character of the house was essential, as “To run one’s estate as a personal domain was the embodiment of an independent and civic-minded gentleman” (196).

Guidebooks, therefore, stipulated the terms according to which a tourist was allowed to visit the country-house. These would have included drawings of the plan of the house or textual descriptions of it, which allowed the visitors to “visualise the house’s arrangement” (197). This was, according to Anderson, “privileged information,” significant because “often known only by the owner and those closest to

him” (199). Nevertheless, by being simultaneously informed of the existence of certain rooms and of their inaccessibility to them, visitors were also reminded of their lack of ownership over the house. This was meant as a clear indication that the house remained a domestic space, accessible in its entirety only to the family. At the same time, as Anderson argues, “the details given about a house’s internal spaces enabled tourists to believe that they had comprehensive knowledge of that interior,” which was ultimately empowering for them” (199). The limitations of their access to the house, therefore, did not prevent visitors from engaging in what Cynthia Sundberg Wall calls a “tourist’s prerogative to imaginatively rearrange” (197). As Wall explains, the country-house tourist did not simply retain the information provided by guidebooks, but “felt perfectly comfortable as imaginative critic or prospective tenant” (194).

This is made clear by various examples provided by Wall, in which tourists express their opinions about what it would be like to inhabit the house they were visiting, thereby demonstrating that, through an imaginative process, they are placing themselves in the position of tenants or even owners of the house. John Byng, for example, comments the following about Raby Castle upon visiting it: “Lord D, will your lordship permit me, a stranger, to lay out £20,000 for you? And I, then, think that I could make your house a wonder of beauty; ... the hall should be in eternal warmth; I should build a chapel; and a Gothic stair-case; and I should render that great room, fitted up with cedar, and glazed with stain’d glass, one of the grandest libraries in the universe” (Wall 194). Byng is evidently not shy in expressing the alterations he would make to the castle were he its owner. In her visit to Knole House, Catherine Lybbe Powys also offers suggestions for improvements: “One goes through the apartments with concern that this young Duke cannot refit the furniture of each. One longs to repair every old chair, table, bed, or cabinet, exactly in its former taste” (Wall 196). The future unreal conditional of Byng’s sentences, and the phrase “One longs” of Powys’s are expressive of the fantasies of possession they experience while visiting the houses of other people. They are demonstrative of how country-house tourism provided people with “a wider cultural awareness of the insides of other people’s houses, a knowledge of their things, and a license to describe, and to re-create them in their own image” (Wall 197). Guidebooks facilitated this process, as Anderson affirms, since the information contained in them offered “vicarious authority” to their experiences of the building, as well as “vicarious possession of the homes they were visiting and reading about” (200).

Guidebooks were not the only documents that stimulated in its readers these feelings of vicarious possession over houses. The rhetoric in auction catalogues, as Wall indicates, encouraged readers to imagine themselves as owners of what was being sold. In catalogues advertising the selling of the lease of an estate, “The whole estate is drawn before us, the description itself is neatly laid out and well stocked with all the necessities, in a logical order of desirability – location, size, amenities, condition, with some detail of inventory. This could be yours; you could step into the whole thing – the lease life of this gentlemanly estate” (Wall 170). This rhetoric encouraged the reader to position themselves imaginatively in the role of the owner of that estate, and to picture a future in which they are able to take full possession over it. The organisation of items in the catalogue also contributed to this, as the description “for the most part moves room by room, rather than by the kind of items to be sold or their value” (Wall 170). This structure facilitates the establishment of a vicarious possession over the estate, as it creates the illusion that the reader is being taken on a guided tour of it. Even when they advertised portable property coming from a house that was itself not for sale, auction catalogues still offered a promise of wholeness if one acquired those objects. As Wall argues, by displaying “both the sheer quantity of ‘parts’ and their various promises of ‘wholes,’” (176) “auctions could present a fully imagined, fully filled domestic space” (168).

Imagining oneself as the owner of a house that one did not legally own was a component of another kind of visit in this period: that of a woman to the home of the prospective husband. This type of visit holds similarities to the tourist’s trip around a country-house, as well as important differences. Primarily, visits to a prospective husband’s house are characterised by a sexual tenor that cannot be attributed to any of the examples previously mentioned. While both constitute an affective relationship between a person and space, possession over the house is only a real possibility for the women visiting that of the prospective husband. For this reason, this relationship is inevitably more powerful than anything that could be experienced by a tourist. As Vickery explains, houses played an essential role in the courting period of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century couples: “The explicit discussion of housing is a striking feature of men’s written proposals. Georgian men and women looked square on that which modern love glosses over, the determining role of financial competence and the nitty-gritty of housing in the making of marriage” (*Behind Closed Doors* 101). Decoration played an important part in this, since a man’s willingness to spend money in

furnishing his house would have been considered revealing of an inclination to get married. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the decoration of the house was essential to a woman's development of feelings of ownership towards it, something corroborated by Vickery: "The denial of a woman's taste boded ill for her happiness and autonomy in marriage" (*Behind Closed Doors* 103). That women would have regarded the use of their creative abilities to decorate the house in which they were to live as a right is evidenced by pieces of correspondence presented by Vickery. In these, women complain of their husbands' tyranny when they would not allow them to do this freely. Lady Cooper, for example, laments in her personal correspondence, amongst other things, her husband's refusal to allow her to make creative decisions about the decoration of their house, characterising him as "a most absolute Tyrant," who refused her "all my due privileges" and who kept her "as a Concubine not as a Wife" (Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors* 103). It is not only in non-fictional texts that this view is expressed, however. In Ferrier's *Marriage* the Duke of Altamont is described as a tyrant because he concerns himself with everything to do with the management of the house without giving his wife any authority, to the point that she "most heartily despised the man she had so lately vowed to love and obey" (396). The lack of legal ownership over their husbands' houses, as these texts evidence, did not prevent married women from regarding control over their surroundings as one of the privileges attached to their married status.

Austen's first three novels, in different ways and for different purposes, place a heroine on a visit to the house of a prospective husband. In this moment in the novel, the heroine has the opportunity to observe carefully the man's house, to look for signs of what the space may tell her about him, as well as to imagine what her life will look like if she makes the decision to become his wife. These episodes depict a relationship with property that is significantly different from those discussed in the previous chapters. As chapter 2 demonstrated, houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were generally conceived as reflections of the moral character of their mistresses. "She who has the best regulated mind," writes More in her *Strictures*, "will have the best regulated family. As in the superintendence of the universe, wisdom is seen in its effects" (2: 3-4). As the manager of a household, a woman was put in a position of considerable power and responsibility, but this came with the consequence of having her moral character directly associated with the state of the house. And yet, this judgement, as Austen's novels demonstrate, is not exclusively applicable to

women. In the three novels on which this chapter will focus, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the heroine is placed in a situation in which she is the observer and the man is the one who is being observed and judged based on the state of his household. Whereas the previous two chapters analysed moments in the novels in which the heroines and other female characters create a sense of rootedness towards the houses they are currently inhabiting, this chapter will focus on spaces over which they take possession only in their imagination, as they envision a future for themselves in them. As such, it will show that the experiences of the characters in these episodes are not just grounded in the present, but display an interesting combination of the present and the future. This chapter will also consider the ways in which Austen as an author conceptualised these moments in her novels, as well as their role within them. I will argue that, for the Austen character, the visit to her prospective home is an occasion where she imagines herself inhabiting a future that is not yet in existence, one that will take place beyond the bounds of the novel itself.

This form of relationship about property will be termed “imagining.” As I will argue, it is through the non-portable property of the prospective husband’s house that the Austen heroine imagines a future in which she will be allowed fully to exercise her abilities and talents. By not limiting a woman’s potential for ownership to portable property, Austen demonstrates that the ability to think of oneself as the owner of the house one inhabits is something that is within the reach of women to whom the law has denied any form of legal right to it. In her novels, Austen acknowledges that in order for a woman to feel like she belongs to the place where she lives she also needs to feel that she is an owner, rather than just an inhabitant, of it. The potential that houses offer for ownership over them is something that Austen portrays her heroines experiencing in the present, despite the actual opportunities for ownership belonging to a future that is not yet in existence and, in the case of Marianne, never will be. Since at the time of the visit to the house of the prospective husband these opportunities are not yet at her reach, the Austen heroine may be disappointed in her aspirations, but it is through the occupation of the space of that house that she envisions a different future for herself and a change in her present situation.

The following sections, therefore, will seek to explore the role that Austen attributes to those episodes within her first three novels. According to Hardy, “Jane Austen’s knowledge and imagination go even beyond the assimilation of people to their properties. She shows how we relate to people through their accessories, how we can

assimilate not only both object and person, but may attach ourselves to other people's property and properties" (137). Hardy provides the example of Marianne's visit to Willoughby's house and consequent interest in it as an example of this. However, property in Austen is not presented as being conceived by the heroine as simply the man's property, but as her own future property. A heroine's interest in the property is not just directed at something that is the possession of and consequently intimately connected with the person to whom she is emotionally attached, but also something that through marriage will, as she sees it, belong to her as well. These characters are thereby not imagining a life for themselves in someone else's house, but in a house that, due to various factors, suits them, and that they can make their own through their ingenuity and talents. As such, they develop an emotional attachment towards it and begin imagining themselves as permanent residents and possessors of that property.¹⁸ Volz also establishes a connection between interest in the property and interest in the owner by arguing that "[t]he novelist's application of physiognomic features of architecture communicates her heroine's shifts in vision that lead to revised perspectives of the owner of that place ... By imbuing the physiognomies of structures and their surroundings with ideological associations, Austen encourages her readers to see the heroine's simultaneous attachment to a place and its owner" (24). Because this "attachment to the property" can be seen as a sign of affection towards its owner, the visit to the house becomes a very sensitive moment for a woman that requires careful handling. Indeed, Vickery argues that "[t]he house was a demonstration of a would-be husband's financial strength," and a very significant part of what he offered a woman when he proposed to her (*Behind Closed Doors* 87). This would have been a well-established fact in the minds of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century people, which meant that a tour around a man's house would have been "pregnant with possibility for the key players ... and meaningful in the eyes of public opinion" (87).

In Austen, a heroine's awareness of this is marked by a particular physical reaction on her part: the blush. Jenna Bergmann has described Catherine's blush in

¹⁸ Recent work on place attachment, such as that by Leila Scannell's and Robert Gifford's "The Experienced Psychological Benefits of Place Attachment" has demonstrated that feelings of belonging or "belongingness" originate from the formation of what they call "place attachment," which they define as "cognitive-emotional bond that forms between individuals and their important settings" (1). It is to this affective component of an individual's attachment to a place that I will be referring to when I use the term "emotional attachment" in my analysis of the feelings Austen's heroines develop towards a particular space.

Northanger Abbey as a “somatic signal that the mind has read and responded to an inscribed ideology of female behaviour” (43) as well as a “suitable response to a particular stimulus” (44). A heroine’s blush during the visit to the prospective husband’s house can indeed be seen as a symptom of her understanding that society’s identification of a man with his property may mean that her concern for the latter will be interpreted as interest for the former. Furthermore, in that moment, the heroine is not simply picturing the man, but imagining herself leading a life as his wife, the house being one of the benefits of that position, which also contributes to the sexual nature of the moment. Interestingly, however, whereas Marianne and Elizabeth are described as blushing either during the visit to the house or when asked about it after it takes place, the same is not true for Catherine during the tour around Henry’s house. Indeed, Austen describes her as feeling embarrassed and silent. This is indicative of a development throughout the years in Austen’s writing, as she reflected on the role these scenes could play in the novel. When in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* we encounter heroines blushing after being asked about the house of the prospective husband, we find an indication that Austen has become more concerned with expressing the sexual tenor of this moment in her novels.

When Catherine leaves Bath for Northanger Abbey, she is looking forward to encountering in it the same aesthetic elements as those about which she has read in her Gothic novels: “Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel” (102). What follows, however, is a stay in which she is given several tours around the house by the General, due to his mistaken idea that she is an heiress and, therefore, a desirable wife for his son. As such, during her stay, she is given the opportunity to take on the active role of carefully observing Northanger Abbey and, subsequently, Henry’s parsonage. On the other hand, however, she is also observed by the General, who is interested in what her reactions can tell him about her willingness to marry her son. Because of this, the General repeatedly tries to tempt Catherine with descriptions of various signs of the family’s wealth to be found around the abbey. Aware that a young woman’s tour around the house of the prospective husband is “pregnant with possibilities” (Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors* 87), he attempts to secure Catherine’s favourable opinion towards the various elements of the house, regarding them as indications of her approval of his son and his family. Privy to their father’s plan that Henry marry Catherine in order to secure her fortune for the family, Henry and his sister demonstrate visible embarrassment at the General’s hints, whereas their

meaning is lost on Catherine, who is unaware of the existence of a misunderstanding. The General first hints at the possibility of a union between Catherine and his son when Catherine compliments his breakfast set: "He trusted, however, that an opportunity might ere long occur of selecting one – though not for himself" (128). By hinting at the possibility of buying a set as a wedding present for Catherine and Henry, he encourages her to imagine a future in which she is married to his son and part of the family. Henry and his sister Elinor are aware of the implication behind the General's words, unlike Catherine, who "was probably the only one of the party who did not understand him" (128).

Catherine's unawareness of the significance that the General is attributing to her tour around Northanger Abbey continues despite the increased regularity of his hints. When he suggests that she be taken for a tour around the garden early in the morning, Catherine is left wondering at his eagerness and at his daughter's embarrassment over it, but cannot account for it: "Catherine did not exactly know how this was to be understood. Why was Miss Tilney so embarrassed?" (129). Catherine's incomprehension of the General's motivation means that she makes no attempt at self-management during the tour and openly expresses her opinions on what she sees. Once outside in the garden, Catherine is "struck ... beyond her expectation, by the grandeur of the Abbey" (130). Here, Austen personalises the house by ascribing agency to its architecture, thus conveying the idea that the physical building, in similarity to the General, is demanding to be admired: "two sides of the quadrangle, rich in Gothic elements, stood forward for admiration" (130). A comic element of this moment in the narrative is the way in which the General shamelessly boasts about the family's prosperity by pointing out several symbols of status and wealth such as his pinery and succession-houses, while Catherine remains unmindful of this. This lack of concern for the indicators of wealth she is being shown characterises Catherine's attitude throughout the tour of the house. Despite the General's attempt at paying her a compliment by leading her into "the real drawing-room," which is, according to him, "used only with company of consequence," Catherine has to feign interest, since "the costliness or elegance of any room's fitting-up could be nothing to her" (134). Austen's indication that the luxurious decorations in the rooms of the abbey fail to interest Catherine is meant to distinguish her feelings from those of any other potential visitor to the house. Indeed, physical signs of the fortune and rank of the owner of the house in its decorations is precisely the sort of thing that would be of interest to someone

visiting a country-house as a tourist. By making it clear that these hold no attraction to Catherine, Austen indicates that she is a different kind of visitor.

The General is not disheartened, however, and continues to attempt to use the tour of the abbey as a way of encouraging Catherine to imagine a future for herself as a member of his family. Whilst showing some of the bed-chambers which are intended for visitors, the General attempts to both gain Catherine's admiration and compliment her by addressing her the following way: "As they were surveying the last, the general, after slightly naming a few of the distinguished characters, by whom they had at times been honoured, turned into a smiling countenance to Catherine, and ventured to hope, that henceforward some of their earliest tenants might be 'our friends from Fullerton'" (136). In mentioning those "distinguished characters," the General is not only boasting of the family's high status in society, but also paying Catherine a compliment by equating her and her family with them. More significantly, this speech is full of indications that he wishes her to look ahead into the future he is picturing for her, one in which her parents and siblings will be invited into Northanger Abbey because they are part of the family. By writing that the General is "[venturing] to hope" that a particular future ("henceforward") will materialise, Austen portrays Catherine being invited to inhabit a future in the present moment. The General tries to stimulate in Catherine an emotional attachment to the place, by painting a pleasing and welcoming picture of what life could be like if she joined their family. Catherine is oblivious to the meaning behind this invitation and simply receives it as a sign of consideration towards her family, which makes her feel guilty about her dislike towards him: "She felt the unexpected compliment, and deeply regretted the impossibility of thinking well of a man so kindly disposed towards herself, and so full of civility towards her family" (136).

Catherine's barely disguised indifference towards the tours around the abbey is in clear contrast with her enthusiasm when it is suggested by the General that they visit Henry's parsonage: "A ball itself could not have been more welcome to Catherine than this little excursion, so strong was her desire to be acquainted with Woodston; and her heart was still bounding with joy" (155). Unlike Catherine, who is still unaware of the motivation behind the General's solicitousness towards her, Henry understands that he means this visit to be a demonstration of his excellent management and up-keeping of his property. He consequently leaves his father's house several days before the visit in order to have the parsonage ready on time. After Henry's departure, Catherine's

interest in the abbey is completely extinguished, as she realises that it was purely based on her longing to visit what she expected would be a similar setting to those of her favourite Gothic novels. Once the abbey proves to be far different from what she had imagined, there is nothing left to captivate her: “What a revolution in her ideas! She, who had so longed to be in an abbey! Now, there was nothing so charming to her imagination as the unpretending comfort of a well-connected Parsonage, something like Fullerton, but better. Fullerton had its faults, but Woodston probably had none. – If Wednesday should ever come!” (156). Catherine’s present is, as this evidences, spent imagining herself inhabiting a different space; the abbey holds no amusement for her anymore, and she is now thinking only of her visit to Henry’s house, about which she has formed high expectations. The parsonage, unlike the abbey, is interesting to her because it offers the possibility that she will one day take possession over it and, in this way, have her affection towards it legitimised. The words “nothing so charming to her imagination” mark the beginning of the imaginative process through which Catherine pictures herself as an inhabitant of the parsonage. Through the expression “something like Fullerton, but better,” Austen indicates that she is wishing for a place to which she feels she belongs, much like she did at her parents’ house. However, the word “better” is expressive of a wish for a change in her current circumstances. There is also a significant difference in the way Catherine conducts herself during this tour. Indeed, this time she feels the need to self-manage and to conceal her enthusiasm for the house from other people: “Catherine was ashamed to say how pretty she thought it, as the General seemed to think an apology necessary for the flatness of the country, and the size of the village; and looked with great admiration at every neat house above the rank of a cottage” (156). For the first time Catherine feels “ashamed” of her favourable feelings towards a space.¹⁹ Previous instances of Catherine’s unrestrained and exuberant demonstration of her admiration towards the abbey were undoubtedly meant by Austen to contrast with her behaviour once at the parsonage.

The parsonage is described as a “new-built substantial stone house,” and due to the quick exhaustion of Catherine’s interest in the abbey when she realises it is a more

¹⁹ During the tour of the abbey, Catherine openly expresses her approval of the architecture of the house in various instances, such as when she is shown the dining-parlour: “she had never seen so large a room as this in her life” (121). She also reacts enthusiastically when she gets an exterior view of the abbey while standing in the lawn: “her feelings of delight were so strong, that without waiting for any better authority, she boldly burst forth in wonder and praise” (130).

modern building than she expected, it is curious that she should still find that she “preferred [the parsonage] to any place she had ever been at” (156). And how do we account for Catherine’s change from complete lack of awareness of the General’s intentions throughout the tour of the abbey to a perfect understanding of the significance of her visit at the parsonage and consequent embarrassment? It is too significant a change in the character’s behaviour for it to be something that Austen could have done inadvertently. The difference surely lies in Catherine’s understanding that the parsonage is Henry’s house, just as the abbey is his father’s. Indeed, Catherine simply does not think of the abbey in terms of vicarious possession. Henry’s absence from both the tour around the abbey and the one around the garden is relevant: since the abbey is not Henry’s house and never will be, as it will be inherited by his brother, and he is not even present at that moment, the house inevitably lacks that more personal interest for Catherine. It is also worth noting that it is Henry who is in charge of the tour around the parsonage, whereas in the abbey it was his father’s responsibility. Due to this, Catherine regards the parsonage as both a representation of Henry’s character – her affection for him making her predisposed to approve of his house – and as an important component of the life she would lead as his wife, which she has been imagining for herself. As such, the visit to the parsonage gains not just a personal but also a sexual charge for Catherine that the abbey completely lacked. However, to reveal the extent of her interest in Henry’s house at this point, before she has been made an offer of marriage, would be seen as presumptuous. Not just establishing a connection between the house and its owner, but also predicting that other people will do the same, Catherine therefore realises that an adjustment to her behaviour is necessary. Expecting the others to keep a close observation of her reactions, she makes an effort to control her verbal and physical demonstrations of interest towards the space.

Austen expresses Catherine’s difficulty in keeping any expressions of interest and enthusiasm under check by portraying her as being mostly silent throughout the entire visit to the parsonage:

Catherine’s mind was too full, as she entered the house, for her either to observe or to say a great deal; and, till called upon by the General for her opinion of it, she had very little idea of the room in which she was sitting. Upon looking round it then, she perceived in a moment that it was the most comfortable room in the

world; but she was too guarded to say so, and the coldness of her praise disappointed him. (157)

The link that Austen establishes here between a mind “too full” and silence recalls her portrayal of certain spaces – those private and secluded – as more conducive to thinking and understanding for the characters. Indeed, in this moment Catherine finds her feelings so overpowering that in order to be able to self-manage effectively she must resort to being silent. Silence, therefore, becomes the solution that she finds for keeping herself from expressing an opinion about the parsonage that may betray her feelings for Henry, the communication of which would be considered inappropriate in her situation as an unengaged young woman. The effort and concentration that this requires means that Catherine remains oblivious to her surroundings until pressed by the General to express an opinion, who once again is attempting to engineer her reactions to the space. At this point, despite her very favourable feelings towards the room, she remains “guarded” – which, again, implies an effort to self-manage – and answers in a way that gives the impression that she is indifferent to it.

This moment of self-management, however, is followed by another in which Catherine becomes more comfortable and, consequently, temporarily abandons her efforts at keeping her opinions on the house to herself. Significantly, this is brought on by Henry “studiously [bringing] forward other topics of conversation, which restores her “to all her usual ease of spirits” (157). Feeling the intimidating presence of the General less acutely, Catherine expresses her approval of the drawing-room, despite it being completely unfurnished. Austen does not provide us with Catherine’s precise words, but by indicating that she is “delighted enough to even satisfy the General” (157), she establishes a contrast between this reaction and the previous one, which had disappointed him:

It was a prettily shaped room, the windows reaching to the ground, and the view from them pleasant, though only over green meadows; and she expressed her admiration at the moment with all the honest simplicity with which she felt it. “Oh! Why do not you fit up this room, Mr. Tilney? What a pity not to have it fitted up! It is the prettiest room I ever saw; it is the prettiest room in the world!”

“I trust,” said the General, with a most satisfied smile, “that it will very speedily be furnished: it waits only for a lady’s taste!”

“Well, if it was my house, I should never sit anywhere else. Oh! What a sweet little cottage there is among the trees – apple trees, too! It is the prettiest cottage!”

“You like it – you approve it as an object – it is enough. Henry, remember that Robinson is spoken to about it. The cottage remains.”

Such a compliment recalled all Catherine’s consciousness, and silenced her directly; and, though pointedly applied to by the General for her choice of the prevailing colour of the paper and hangings, nothing like an opinion on the subject could be drawn from her. (157-158)

Having let go of any attempt to self-manage, Catherine is effusive in the communication of her feelings, going as far as to declare that the room in which they are standing is “the prettiest room in the world!” In the description of Catherine looking out of the windows of the parsonage (“the view from them pleasant”), the word “view” has a double meaning, referring both to the sight of the space surrounding the parsonage and to the mental process through which, while she is inhabiting the space of the parsonage in the present time, Catherine is looking into a future in which she will be able to occupy that space on a permanent basis and take full possession over it. Austen’s choice of words to convey Catherine’s experience of this imaginative process through which she places herself in the position of inhabitant and owner of the parsonage is similar to those used by tourists doing the same with country-houses they were visiting (“Well, if this was my house, I should never sit anywhere else”). By imagining a future in which she is able to occupy that space whenever she pleases, Catherine is thinking of herself as belonging to it, as fitting that particular environment. Moreover, the use of the possessive pronoun “my” indicates that Catherine is not just imagining herself occupying this space but also claiming ownership over it. The use of the future real conditional conveys an idea of potentiality, but also of risk that the future Catherine is imagining for herself will not materialise. And yet, the context in which she is visiting the house separates her from a tourist, since for her there is a real possibility that the future she is hoping for will indeed take place. This difference is significant, as it means that she is allowed – and even encouraged, as the General’s hints indicate – to create an emotional attachment towards the place as she imagines herself inhabiting that potential future.

The General, visibly pleased by Catherine’s approval of the room, takes the opportunity once again to hint at the desirability of a marriage between her and his

son. By mentioning a future that he hopes will “very speedily” materialise he expresses his confidence in the upcoming marriage and encourages Catherine to imagine a time in which she will be the mistress of that house. His intimation that the house has been kept unfurnished because it is waiting for “a lady’s taste” is a reference to the idea that willingness to spend money on house furnishings was a sign of a man’s inclination to get married. As Vickery explains, “[r]efurbishment was seen as a key to a woman’s heart. It was a commonplace that women of the quality, the gentry and the middling sort put a high social and emotional value on interior furnishings” (*Behind Closed Doors* 101). A bachelor’s house would not have contained many of the comforts that people would have expected to see in the house of a married couple, which made a change in the furnishings necessary. Furthermore, a man’s willingness to adapt the house and the furniture to its new inhabitant is also demonstrative of a readiness to facilitate a woman’s development of feelings of ownership towards the house. As the previous chapter demonstrated, decoration can play an important role in the expression of a woman’s identity, as well as her feelings of belonging to a place. Since a man’s house was regarded not only as a reflection of his standing in society but also of his character, a woman would have wished, as Vickery indicates, to approve of it wholeheartedly before she connected herself with him. A house could provide the prospective bride with a great deal of information about the man and the life that she could lead if she were married to him, and for this reason “Sweethearts and brides were expected to be keenly interested in all the appointments of the marital home” (*Behind Closed Doors* 87). The General, therefore, attempts to gauge how favourable Catherine would be towards a marriage proposal from his son by observing her reactions during the tour of the house. By affirming that the house is in need of “a lady’s taste,” he hints at his hopes that, in the near future, Catherine’s supposed fortune as well as decorative abilities will be used to improve the house, granting it – and subsequently his son and his family – more prestige.

The General’s reaction to Catherine’s appraisal of the cottage that can be seen through the windows of the parish is an intimation that a wife’s lack of legal ownership over the property would not have prevented her from holding considerable power over it. We can assume that this exchange is in reference to improvements Henry is doing to both the interior and the exterior of his parsonage, which would involve the tearing down of the cottage. However, because Catherine takes a liking to the cottage, these plans will be revoked. Presumably, Henry owns not just the parsonage but also the

land and houses immediately surrounding it and, as his wife, Catherine will – in every way but the legal one – share in this ownership and the privileges that come with it. The General's willingness to grant this power to Catherine even before she has married his son indicates that, as Vickery affirms, even though this visit is "built on a misunderstanding," that of Catherine being an heiress who will bring wealth and social status to the family, "the successful viewing of the house has become an implied contract of marriage" (*Behind Closed Doors* 83). Catherine understands this and immediately reverts back to exerting self-control over the expression of her opinions on the house. The General's hint has, once again, "recalled all ... [her] consciousness" (*Behind Closed Doors* 158). He encourages Catherine to continue to visualise what her occupation of the space of the house would look like by consulting her opinions on potential decorations for it but, conscious of the meaning of such a conversation, Catherine remains silent.

This silence prevents her from saying anything else that openly discloses that, throughout the visit to the house, she has been imagining a future in which she is its mistress. Nevertheless, Catherine overcomes "these embarrassing associations" and her fear of making her interest in Henry too obvious when they all step outside of the house:

The influence of fresh objects and fresh air, however, was of great use in dissipating these embarrassing associations; and, having reached the ornamental part of the premises, consisting of a walk round two sides of a meadow, on which Henry's genius had begun to act about half a year ago, she was sufficiently recovered to think it prettier than any pleasure-ground she had ever been in before, though there was not a shrub in it higher than the green bench in the corner. (158)

Here, Austen makes it clear that there is a role reversal, as it is Henry, a man, who is being judged on the way he has used his talents and ingenuity ("genius") to improve his property. This description also shows that, unlike the descriptions of other heroine's visits to the houses of the prospective husbands – which will be analysed later in this chapter – this one is deeply ironic. A few paragraphs before, Austen indicates that Catherine believes the village in which the parsonage is situated to be preferable "to any place she had ever been at" (156) despite the fact that the General feels the need

to apologise for “the flatness of the country, and the size of the village” (156), and the room in which she is standing to be “the prettiest in the world” (157) when it is not even furnished. Once in the garden, Catherine also thinks it “prettier than any pleasure-garden she had ever been in before” (158). Arguably, this is a reflection of Catherine’s inexperience, as she has barely left her parents’ parsonage her entire life. This is in contrast with Marianne and Elizabeth, who by the time they visit their prospective husband’s house have lived on a large estate and been on tours around some of the most impressive estates in the country, respectively. Catherine’s fervent approval of the garden is purely subjective. She believes the garden to be the best one she has ever seen “though there was not a shrub in it higher than the green bench in the corner” quite simply because it is Henry’s and could one day be hers.

After this tour, which has consolidated her feelings towards Henry, Catherine is actively imagining herself in a potential future, one in which she is Henry’s wife and the mistress of the parsonage she just visited:

At six o’clock, the General having taken his coffee, the carriage again received them; and so gratifying had been the tenor of his conduct throughout the whole visit, so well assured was her mind on the subject of his expectations, that, could she have felt equally confident of the wishes of his son, Catherine would have quitted Woodston with little anxiety as to the How or the When she might return to it. (158)

This excerpt illustrates how Austen’s exploration of the concept of belonging in her novels includes the idea of longing and is thus characterised by a combination between the present and the future. Austen depicts Catherine establishing a sense of possession not towards a property in which she is living in the current moment, but one that, like the General, she has “expectations” she will one day inhabit. As Austen’s description of Catherine’s thoughts and reactions throughout the tour evidence, however, the fact that Catherine does not currently live in the parsonage in no way hinders the development of these feelings of ownership, as the contact with the property allows her to imaginatively inhabit that future. When she receives an invitation from Henry and his sister to prolong her stay at Northanger Abbey indefinitely, she sees this as an indication that she might be right in assuming they wish her “to belong to them”: “She did – almost always – believe that Henry loved her, and quite always that his father

and sister loved and even wished her to belong to them; and believing so far, her doubts and anxieties were mere sportive irritations” (163). The concept of belonging here encompasses several meanings: to become a member of the Tilney family, to be compatible with the prospective husband, to fit the environment in which he and his family live and, quite simply, to be an inhabitant of the same place in which they live. Like “living,” this concept is connected with ideas of sociability and intimately linked with property. As the episode of the tour around the parsonage has demonstrated, time spent in the prospective husband’s house is essential to the formation of those feelings of ownership that, though in the future, are, through the imagination, experienced quite powerfully in the present time. Catherine’s opportunities for gaining a complete possession over the house may not materialise until she marries Henry, but that does not prevent her from feeling “doubts and anxieties” as if this space were already hers. These feelings can thus be seen as symptomatic of her longing towards the way of life she could have as Henry’s wife.

That Catherine is imagining herself inhabiting that future time, even after the General has forced her to abandon the abbey, is indicated by Austen through the description of her restlessness and inability to concentrate when she returns home to her parents. Her difficulty in partaking in the usual activities intimates that Henry’s home, and not her parents’, is the place where Catherine feels she belongs. Catherine has already formed an attachment towards the house and the way of life it could offer her, to the extent that her present situation seems inferior to her.

4.2 Mourning ownership

The previous chapter demonstrated that much scholarly work has been undertaken on the constraints imposed on single women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how this is reflected in the literature of the period, and the same is certainly applicable to married women. Holcombe, for example, writing on the period preceding the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, argues that “On the one hand, the law often inflicted grievous practical hardships upon women. On the other, the law, regarding a woman as her husband’s servant, even as his chattel, destroyed her independence, her identity, and her self-respect” (3). According to Holcombe, a woman’s lack of legal ownership over property prevented her not only from asserting

her identity but from having one at all. Kaplan sees in Austen's novels a portrayal of what she considers to be the extremely limited options available for genteel women: "Genteel domesticity assigned to women a devalued role and only that role. As it was practiced by Austen's community, domesticity effectively inhibited other ways of life. The perpetuation of status through the reproduction of family appearances was virtually the only 'career' open to women" (41). Kaplan argues, therefore, that the maintenance of the family's standing in society was the closest thing to a profession that genteel women were allowed to have, something which, she claims, is represented in Austen's novels.

Other authors, however, have demonstrated that the distribution of power and influence in a household was more complex than this. Harvey explains that although the prevalent system in this period is a patriarchal one, that should not imply the erasure of any influence and power for women in it:

"Patriarchy" as a term of description for the household should be used with care: it should not be understood to mean that only a male household head possessed authority and at the expense of others in the household. If patriarchy in general was a grid of relations, then domestic patriarchy was a system of order in the household in which different individuals may each have access to different kinds and levels of power. (4)

According to Harvey, it is legitimate to characterise eighteenth-century society as patriarchal "if we define patriarchy in a way that accommodates the exercise of often considerable authority on the part of women in the interests of the shared household unit" (79). As Harvey affirms, "women's agency in the household was entirely compatible with the central tenet of the discourse of oeconomy that men had ultimate control over goods and property" (79). The master of the house ultimately held legal control over the property, but it does not follow that a woman was constrained to a limitative and submissive role in the household. For instance, Wakefield writes in her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* that "The plain answer to these cavils is, that men should not marry women who are unworthy of their confidence; and that in a well-founded marriage, interest is indivisible" (106-107). Wakefield is here advising men to share information on the family's economic affairs with their wives, refuting any potential contestations with the argument that if a man feels that a woman cannot

be trusted with this information, then she is not a suitable wife. Wakefield concludes by arguing that both the husband and wife hold the same level of interest in such affairs, even though the money would belong to the husband, the wife not having any control over it. Arguably, the same is applicable to property: while legal control over it belonged exclusively to the husband, it does not follow that a woman would not have felt that the property was also hers. Vickery, for example, argues that “[t]he mistress of the house was a figure of respectability and power. In ‘her house and her housekeeping,’ a woman experienced ownership” (*Behind Closed Doors* 87). A similar argument is made by Wynne, who states that “it is possible that the changes in the law had little effect on the perceptions of women who had always presumed that they owned their things” (24).²⁰

In *Sense and Sensibility* we encounter a representation of a way of establishing feelings of ownership over a space that, though similar in some respects to the ones encountered in *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*, is not to be found anywhere else in Austen. In this novel, after the dissolution of her relationship with Willoughby, Marianne is portrayed mourning the ownership of a property over which she never gets the chance to take possession, neither within the bounds of the novel nor beyond them. Opportunities for possession belong to a future that never actually materialises. Austen thus demonstrates that, despite the fact that the feeling of ownership was created through the imagination, Marianne experiences loss after the future she was picturing for herself stops being a possibility. Throughout the novel, Marianne experiences and works through this peculiar kind of mourning, something which has an effect on the tenor of the novel. Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* are narrated from the point of view of Catherine and Elizabeth respectively and, despite the challenges that they go through, the reader always expects the novel to end with their marriage to the respective prospective husbands, Henry Tilney and Darcy. *Sense and Sensibility*, on the other hand, is more melancholic since, by writing it from Elinor’s point of view, Austen offers several indications throughout the novel that the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby does not have the foundations for a prosperous and harmonious future. For that reason, it is not surprising to the reader when Willoughby ends their relationship. Marianne, however, is represented as

²⁰ Here, Wynne is referring not just to the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, but also to the one of 1893, which made wives liable for their own debts.

possessing an undoubting belief that she will marry Willoughby, which leads to a rapid decline in her health when she is forced to come to terms with the reality that the marriage will not take place.²¹

It is not possible to understand the depth of Marianne's mourning unless we acknowledge the extent to which she has previously established feelings of ownership towards Willoughby's property. Throughout the novel, Willoughby not only expresses a romantic interest in Marianne, but actively encourages her to imagine a future in which she is his wife. First, he offers her the gift of a horse, which she is keen to accept until Elinor reminds her not just of the impropriety but also of the added cost for the family in accepting it. When Marianne finally rejects the offer of this present, Willoughby responds the following way: "But Marianne, the horse is still yours, though you cannot use it now. I shall keep it until you can claim it. When you leave Barton to form your own establishment in a more lasting home, Queen Mab shall receive you" (45). Elinor overhears this speech and sees it as an indication of "a perfect agreement between them," and "[f]rom that moment she doubted not of their being engaged to each other" (45). In it, Willoughby establishes a contrast between the present ("now") and a future time in which it will be both appropriate and financially viable for her to accept his present ("until you can claim it"). Used here as a preposition, "until" expresses the subjunctive character of this form of relationship towards property. It conveys a sense of potentiality, as well as of a certain level of risk that this future that is being imagined will not actually materialise. This risk makes the emotional attachment that the female character establishes towards the property that much more potent. By affirming that in this future time the horse, which is currently in his possession, will "receive" her, Willoughby makes it clear that he wishes Marianne to imagine herself living in his house. But the most significant part of the speech is the difference that Willoughby establishes between Marianne's current house and the one he is encouraging her to imagine for herself. In fact, he coaxes Marianne into thinking of her current home as being comparatively precarious to the one he can offer her, which will be more "lasting." The word "home" carries an emotional tenor, whereas "establishment" implies ideas of stability and security. By choosing these words, Willoughby is attempting to get an emotional reaction out of Marianne by

²¹ For a take on the effects of the dissolution of the relationship with Willoughby on Marianne's body, see Wiltshire's *Jane Austen and the Body*, p. 41.

incentivising her to visualise a time in which she will have a house that feels secure and permanent, thereby implying that her current one does not offer her the same security. By calling the home that she could have as his wife “your own establishment,” Willoughby is also encouraging Marianne to imagine herself as co-owner of that property. As such, he implies that any feelings of ownership that she may form towards his house will be more legitimate than any that she might form towards the cottage, despite her lacking any legal right over the property in both cases. In doing so, Willoughby manipulates Marianne by encouraging her to consider her current home as lacking in the same security, stability and opportunities for the exercise of ownership over the property that she would hold as his wife.

The offer of this present is one of the events in Marianne’s relationship with Willoughby that leads their neighbours to assume that they are engaged and Marianne to assume that they very soon will be. One need only think of *Emma* to remember that the offer of such a present would have been inappropriate between a couple that was not engaged. In that novel, when the eponymous heroine finds out that Jane Fairfax has been offered the present of a piano, not knowing of any potential candidates for Jane’s fiancée, she assumes that she has a lover. Willoughby also cuts a lock off Marianne’s hair, an act that has sexual connotations.²² Yet, the most significant moment in the duration of their relationship is that in which he takes Marianne on a tour of Allenham, the house that he is to inherit from his aunt, Mrs. Smith. In contrast to *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader does not witness this moment from Marianne’s perspective, but only has access to the account she offers her sister. Like Elinor, the reader first finds out about it through Mrs. Jennings, who playfully informs her of her knowledge that Marianne and Willoughby “had gone to Allenham, and spent a considerable time there walking about the garden and going all over the house” completely unaccompanied (52). Marianne reacts to this by blushing (51), showing that she understands the sexual implications of such a visit: “Marianne coloured” (51). Mrs. Jennings continues: “I hope you like your house, Miss Marianne. It is a very large one, I know, and when I come to see you, I hope you will have it new-furnished, for it wanted it very much, when I was there six years ago” (51). This speech indicates not just Mrs. Jennings’s assumption that Marianne and Willoughby are engaged, but also

²² Jill Heydt-Stevenson calls this an “erotic moment” in the novel (36). She explains that “psychoanalytic theory interprets hair on the head as a metonym for the genitals” and that hair “has always been associated with sensuality and the language of sexual usury” (36).

attributes to the first ownership over the house through the pronoun “your.” Implicit here is the expectation that, upon moving to the husband’s house, if not before, a woman would undertake a complete redecoration and refurbishment of the house, so as to adapt it to her own personal taste.

When confronted by her sister about the tour, Marianne’s response makes it clear that during the visit she has begun to establish feelings of ownership towards Willoughby’s house:

“I am not sensible of having done anything wrong in walking over Mrs. Smith’s grounds, or in seeing her house. They will one day be Mr. Willoughby’s, and...”

“If they were one day to be your own, Marianne, you would not be justified in what you have done.”

She blushed at this hint; but it was even visibly gratifying to her; and after a ten minutes’ interval of earnest thought, she came to her sister again, and said with great good humour, “Perhaps, Elinor, it was rather ill-judged in me to go to Allenham; but Mr. Willoughby wanted particularly to shew me the place; and it is a charming house I assure you. There is one remarkably pretty sitting room up stairs; of a nice comfortable size for constant use, and with modern furniture it would be delightful ... I did not see it to advantage, for nothing could be more forlorn than the furniture, – but if it were newly fitted up – a couple of hundred pounds, Willoughby says, would make it one of the pleasantest summer-rooms in England.”

Could Elinor have listened to her without interruption from the others, she would have described every room in the house with equal delight. (52-53)

Marianne’s blush intimates that, as Elinor has guessed, she is already mentally inhabiting that future time in which she will be able to take possession over the space of Allenham. Her reaction to Elinor’s use of the pronoun “your own” also indicates that she has begun to think of Allenham not only as Willoughby’s house but also as her own. Marianne’s consideration of potential changes in the furniture of the house shows that she is mentally rearranging its interior, much as a tourist would have felt tempted to do. Like the comments by John Byng and Catherine Lybbe Powys upon visiting other people’s country-houses, Marianne is not shy in expressing her true opinions on the decorative efforts of the current owner of the house, affirming that

“nothing could be more forlorn than the furniture.” And yet, unlike these tourists, there is a serious possibility that she will be able to take possession over the space. In this speech, Marianne indicates that it was Willoughby who started this conversation about potential refurbishments. Her comment that “Mr. Willoughby wanted particularly to shew me the place” is indicative of the way in which, through the visit, Willoughby attempts to encourage these feelings of emotional attachment towards his future property in Marianne. He does this by inviting her to imagine a time in which she will be able to consolidate her feelings of ownership towards the house by decorating it according to her taste. As Vickery’s analysis of courtship correspondence in *Behind Closed Doors* indicates, “[o]nly betrothed couples mere weeks, sometimes days from the altar, have conversations of this practical intimacy” (84). By introducing this topic, Willoughby is encouraging Marianne to mentally inhabit a future in which she is mistress of Allenham, thereby indicating that he wishes to marry her. In doing so, he places Marianne in a precarious situation, since their status as an unengaged couple means that she has not received a promise from him that the affection she has begun to establish towards this potential future will ever be legitimised through marriage.

Austen’s representation of Marianne’s relationship towards Allenham demonstrates that the constraints imposed on women by the law do not necessarily deter them from conceiving of themselves as owners of houses, even of those in which they are not currently living. The difference between this type of relationship towards property and the one analysed in the previous chapter is that the first presents a combination of present and future, whereas “living” is exclusively grounded on the present. Before she meets Willoughby, Marianne is portrayed by Austen as occupying and taking possession over the space of Barton cottage in the present, but after the visit to Allenham her sense of belonging becomes progressively more attached to it, instead of the cottage. Like Catherine after she returns to her parents’ house, the tour results in Allenham replacing her present home as the place where she feels she belongs. This is made particularly clear by Austen in the conversation that Marianne holds with Edward and her sister, in which the three of them discuss their conceptions of what constitutes a “competence” and “wealth”:

“Perhaps,” said Elinor, smiling, “we may come to the same point. Your competence and my wealth are very much alike, I dare say ... Come, what is your competence?”

“About eighteen hundred or two thousand a year; not more than that.”

Elinor laughed. “Two thousand a year! One is my wealth! I guessed how it would end.”

“And yet two thousand a year is a very moderate income,” said Marianne. “A family cannot well be maintained on a smaller. I am sure I am not extravagant in my demands. A proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters, cannot be supported on less.”

Elinor smiled again, to hear her sister describing so accurately their future expenses at Combe Magna.

“Hunters!” repeated Edward – “But why must you have hunters? Everybody does not hunt.” Marianne coloured as she replied, “But most people do.” (69)

Here, Austen indicates that Marianne has begun to imagine a life for herself as Willoughby’s wife, and that this involves a reflection not just on refurbishments and decorations, but also on what their expenses would be and what income would be needed to support them. Indeed, Marianne considers some aspects of the management of a country-house: the hiring and overseeing of a sufficient yet affordable number of servants, as well as the purchase and maintenance of a carriage and horses to be used for hunting. In doing so, she is placing herself mentally in the position of household manager of Allenham. Marianne’s ability to “so accurately” describe these expenses indicates that this was part of the conversation that she had with Willoughby whilst at Allenham. The visit to that estate and Willoughby’s encouragement for her to imagine a future with him has allowed her not just to form feelings of ownership and belonging towards Allenham but also towards Willoughby’s other property, Coombe Magna. Elinor may react to this by smiling, but in reality this moment in the narrative is deeply ironic and offers a clear indication to the reader that a marriage between Marianne and Willoughby will not take place. Austen has informed us that Coombe Magna provides Willoughby with only £600 a year, and also hinted at the possibility that Allenham will bring with it an added expense, as it is in need of refurbishment and potentially repairs. Furthermore, it is also indicated in the novel that Willoughby already spends more than his income, despite being a bachelor and therefore not

having a wife and children to support.²³ By portraying Marianne imagining a lifestyle for herself and Willoughby that encompasses such luxuries as “a carriage, perhaps two,” and hunters, Austen intimates that this relationship is doomed to fail.

The continuation of the conversation demonstrates that Marianne is aware that she is not focusing on the present, as she did before, but imaginatively inhabiting a future in which she is Willoughby’s wife, which causes her to blush:

“I wish,” said Margaret, striking out a novel thought, “that somebody would give us all a large fortune apiece!”

“Oh that they would!” cried Marianne, her eyes sparkling with animation, and her cheeks glowing with the delight of such imaginary happiness.

“We are all unanimous in that wish, I suppose,” said Elinor, “in spite of the insufficiency of wealth.”

“Oh dear!” cried Margaret, “how happy I should be! I wonder what I should do with it!”

Marianne looked as if she had no doubt on that point. (69-70)

Marianne blushes when Edward remarks that hunting is a luxury many genteel people do not enjoy, thereby exposing the mental process through which she is imagining a future specifically with Willoughby, by describing his habits. Here, her cheeks are described as “glowing” because, once again, her awareness that she is imagining a life for herself with Willoughby adds a sexual tenor to the conversation. In this moment, Marianne is picturing scenes of “imaginary happiness” and indulging in the visualisation of a potential future in which she receives an inheritance. Such an addition to her fortune would allow her to bring a generous dowry into her marriage with Willoughby, with which they could counter any opposition from his aunt and support their desired lifestyle. The extreme unlikelihood of this scenario ever taking place makes Marianne’s longing for a future with Willoughby that much more poignant. The intimation that this is the only event that could make a marriage between the two of them viable means that the reader is not surprised that what follows

²³ The reader is informed in *Sense and Sensibility* that Willoughby is in debt when he affirms, during a conversation with Elinor, that “My fortune was never large, and I had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income than myself. Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts” (242).

in the narrative is Willoughby's abandonment of Marianne, followed by a "gloomy dejection" on her part, as she mourns the loss of this future life she had been imagining for herself.

Exactly what is lost by Marianne when Willoughby becomes engaged to another woman has been a topic of contention in criticism of the novel. Duckworth affirmed that "her relationship to Willoughby has been for Marianne the constitution of a society of two, and when this is lost through the defection of one of its members, Marianne has no rule of living, no motive for action, no 'ground' on which to stand" (109). However true this may be, Marianne has lost even more than this: the opportunity of ever taking possession over Willoughby's two houses, an income – though one not nearly as comfortable as the one she had imagined – and a legitimate role as mistress of two large estates, as well as the power and influence that comes with it. Moreover, with the breakup of the relationship, Marianne loses a sense of belonging, which was grounded on that future she was imagining for herself in Willoughby's property. In other words, she has lost a potential future, one to which she had become powerfully attached. In contrast to this, however, Sandie Byrne has argued that the limitations in the law with regards to women and property prevent Austen from portraying women possessing feelings of ownership towards property:

A key part of the characterisation of Mary Musgrove is that she snobbishly despises the Hayters' unpretentious farmhouse, Winthrop, and that her husband cannot get her to appreciate the value of freehold land. Why should she? Why should Marianne Dashwood think of Allenham, or Mary Crawford of Mansfield Park, in terms of anything but the need for new furniture, or Mary Crawford find Mansfield's having a real park more impressive than that it has timber? Why should Harriet Smith think of the parsonage in terms of anything but curtains, or the Martins' farm in any thing but number of parlours and pet cows? Why should not Catherine Morland find little to interest her in General Tilney's productive kitchen-garden and succession-houses? Few of the women will have anything to do with the management of farm or estate, and none of them will own either house or land ... Most of the women characters in Austen's novels, then, are conduits but not holders of wealth, and occupiers but not owners of the house and estates. (237-238)

Byrne's comments are grounded on the idea that it is not possible for someone to experience ownership over a space without this being legitimised by the possession of the legal status of owner. The argument that "few of the women will have anything to do with the management of the farm or estate" is also contentious. As the first two chapters of this thesis have shown, both historical and literary sources demonstrate that the role of the female manager of a house was conceptualised as one of considerable power, which comprised a great variety of duties and responsibilities, and that even female legal ownership of property was far more widespread than we might imagine. Furthermore, the examples that Byrne provides are of women who are either ignorant about certain aspects to do with the management of an estate – Harriet Smith and Mary Musgrove – or those who are merely looking for obvious signs of wealth in the estate to measure the suitability of the owner – Mary Crawford. In none of these cases is the depicted relationship towards property being presented as representative of female ownership. As we have seen, Catherine's lack of interest towards the aspects of the Northanger Abbey estate Byrne mentions can be attributed to them being mere symbols of wealth that do not hold the same personal interest for her as Henry's house.

As the third chapter of this thesis has demonstrated, prior to the portrayal of Marianne's relationship with Willoughby, Austen had already represented her developing feelings of ownership and belonging towards a house that is legally not hers, the cottage which she shares with her mother and sisters. Whereas Barton cottage allowed her to physically inhabit a space in the present and, through its occupation and modification, to feel that it is her own space, Willoughby's property enables her, in the present, to imagine herself taking control over that space in the future. With the introduction of Willoughby into the narrative, therefore, Austen represents Marianne forming a different kind of relationship towards property, but one that is, though risky, no less powerful. As the novel is written from the point of view of Elinor, Marianne's more cautious sister, some judgement is directed towards Marianne, due to the complete trust she puts in a man of whom she knows so little. And yet, there is no irony in Marianne declaring that she felt herself "solemnly engaged" (140) to Willoughby, despite him never having made her an offer of marriage. In reality, for the extent of their relationship, Marianne and Willoughby go through many stages associated with engaged and even married couples. Besides the various instances in which Willoughby plainly encourages Marianne to conceptualise what married life with him would look like, he offers her an expensive present and takes her on a tour around the house he is

to inherit, in order to gain her approval of it and to discuss potential refurbishments with her, something that would only be appropriate between engaged couples. As Vickery has stated, the importance of the tour of the prospective husband's house, in which details about potential refurbishments are discussed, is not to be underestimated (*Behind Closed Doors* 87). For this reason, Marianne's interest in the furniture at Allenhurst should not be dismissed as insignificant, as it demonstrates that, in her imagination, she is already occupying that house and the role of its mistress. It is also not an accurate depiction to claim that Marianne only ever considers the ownership with regards to decoration, since in the previously mentioned extract she describes "so accurately their future expenses at Combe Magna" (69), which demonstrates that she has been considering various aspects of her potential future lifestyle as mistress of that estate.

There is something inherently feminist in the way in which Austen represents female characters such as Marianne planning and thinking about the future in this way. The lack of a legal right over the house where one lives and of an independent income makes the life of a single woman potentially unpredictable and precarious, as the loss of home and reduction of circumstances that Marianne experiences illustrates. Though not forced to leave their homes at any point in the novels, Catherine and Elizabeth also find themselves in insecure situations. Catherine's father is a clergyman with a numerous family, which means that when he dies Catherine, her mother and her siblings will be left without a home or a source of income. The death of Elizabeth's father would also have similar consequences for her, who would be forced to depend on her mother's generosity until her own death, at which point she will inherit £50 a year. This instability leads all three characters to think about the future. Marianne, however, unlike the other two, never gets to experience this future she has imagined for herself. Her emotional pain after the breakup of the relationship with Willoughby serves as a demonstration of the risks inherent to the formation of an attachment to an imaginary future that may or may not come true.

Austen's representation of Marianne's mourning the loss of Willoughby resonates with Wollstonecraft's description in her conduct book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), of the disappointment suffered by women when they are persuaded by a man that he will marry them, when in reality he has no intention of doing so:

Few men seriously think of marrying an inferior; and if they have honour enough not to take advantage of the artless tenderness of a woman who loves, and thinks not of the difference of rank, they do not undeceive her until she has anticipated happiness, which, contrasted with her dependent situation, appears delightful. The disappointment is severe; and the heart received a wound which does not early admit of a compleat cure, as the good that is missed is not valued according to its real worth: for fancy drew the picture, and grief delights to create food to feed on. (76)

This description is applicable to the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby in various ways. In this case, there is not a difference in rank between the man and the woman, but there can be said to be one of fortune, as Marianne has only £1000 to her name and, as long as her mother is alive, £125 a year, a quarter of the £500 annual amount the Dashwood women have at their disposal. Marianne is only dependent on her mother for part of her income, so her situation is not as insecure as that of women who would have had to work to sustain themselves. Nevertheless, she is living on a lower income than Willoughby's, a marriage to him meaning an improvement in her circumstances.²⁴ She has also lived in a large estate before, and what Willoughby offers is the opportunity to inhabit such a house again, this time as its mistress. For the length of the relationship, Willoughby has also encouraged her to think of her current situation as more precarious than the one he could offer her. Most importantly, in this excerpt Wollstonecraft describes the process through which a woman is able to conceptualise a future for herself with the prospective husband and mentally inhabit that future of "anticipated happiness." These feelings of "anticipated happiness" of which Wollstonecraft speaks, which convey the establishment of expectations and an emotional attachment towards a potential future, resonate with Austen's description of Marianne's "delight of such imaginary happiness" (69), as she considers the life she could have with Willoughby if she were an heiress. By stating that it is the "fancy" or imagination which creates this conception of what the potential future would look like in someone's mind, thus enabling the person to become attached to it, Wollstonecraft

²⁴ See Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, in which he explains these differences in fortune. The average annual income in this period was £30, which means that Marianne, with £125 a year, has "barely four times the average per capita income," whereas Willoughby, with £600, has twenty times that average amount (413).

recognises the power that this imaginative process holds. Wollstonecraft also calls attention to the potential that grief has of making someone imagine an idealised future that does not correspond to the one that might have realistically materialised. This is certainly true for Marianne, since she has been imagining a future lifestyle for herself and Willoughby that his fortune would never have been able to provide. Marianne, however, does not realise this, which adds to the severity and the endurance of her feelings of dejection. It may be true that, as Paula Byrne affirms, Marianne is one of the characters in Austen's novels "whose melancholic temperaments are partly instrumental in their own misery" (*The Genius* 123). However, Marianne's feelings after the breakup of her relationship with Willoughby are reflective of far more than this. Indeed, the feelings of "disappointment" and "grief" that Wollstonecraft correctly attributes to a woman in this situation are expressive of an act of mourning, which in itself implies a feeling of loss. As such, these women experience such feelings because they believe that what they are currently mourning belonged to them at some point. The grief that Marianne and the women Wollstonecraft describes feel, therefore, marks loss in a way that reaffirms that sense of possession. For both, this feeling of possession is, evidently, not dependent on the legality of their ownership of the property or even the legality of their relationship with its male owner.

The medium of the novel allows Austen to represent this imaginative process through which Marianne mentally inhabits a potential future, as well as the process of mourning she goes through after she discovers that this future will never materialise. Marianne does not accept the loss of Willoughby until after her near-death illness, caused by her walks in the rain at Cleveland, in which she thinks of Willoughby and his house, whilst being some miles away from his estate. Through the narrator's description of Marianne's thoughts during these walks, Austen emphasises the role that the imagination plays in her establishment of feelings of ownership and belonging towards Coombe Magna:

Marianne entered the house with an heart swelling with emotion from the consciousness of being only eighty miles from Barton, and not thirty from Combe Magna; and before she had been five minutes within its walls, while the others were busily helping Charlotte shew her child to the housekeeper, she quitted it again, stealing away through the winding shrubberies, now just beginning to be in beauty, to gain a distant eminence; where, from its Grecian

temple, her eye, wandering over a wide tract of country to the south-east, could fondly rest on the farthest ridge of hills in the horizon, and fancy that from their summits Combe Magna might be seen. (228-229)

Here, Austen describes Marianne reaching a piece of rising ground (“a distant eminence”), a vantage point from which she can observe the landscape and look into “the farthest hills in the horizon.” In *Pride and Prejudice*, as we will see, Austen depicts Elizabeth occupying this position, but presents it as one of power and possibility, whereas in *Sense and Sensibility* it is one of mourning of that potentiality. The particular language that Austen uses indicates that Marianne is not simply looking out into the landscape but, simultaneously, contemplating the potential future she has imagined for herself. In *Northanger Abbey*, where Austen portrays Catherine admiring the “view” (157) from the windows of the parsonage, she may be referring not just to the perspective she gets of the space surrounding it, but also to the imaginative process through which she mentally inhabits a prospective future in which she would be able to consider it her home. Here, Austen describes the way in which Marianne “fondly” contemplates the landscape, a reference to the affection that she feels towards the space of Willoughby’s estate and the potential future to which it is associated. The word “fancy,” on the other hand, hints at the imaginative quality of the process through which she has envisioned herself simultaneously belonging to the space of the estate and having it belong to her. Furthermore, the indication that Marianne cannot see Coombe Magna, but can only “fancy” that it is there is symbolic and most definitely not accidental, which is very much why here, in contrast to the other two novels, Austen represents the mourning of ownership rather than the potential for it. Austen’s choice to depict Marianne contemplating a landscape that is empty of the object she is looking for emphasises the unattainability of the future she had imagined for herself. It also reinforces Marianne’s feelings of longing for a future as Willoughby’s wife, which is intimately connected to the space of the estate, while at the same time confirming that this future will never materialise. This detail in the description refers to the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby, one in which she was beguiled by him into thinking about and imagining a future that could never have taken place and that he never intended it would. The absence of the physical house from this scene thus effectively contributes to the general melancholic tone of the novel. And yet, Austen’s use of the prospect trope to portray a woman mourning her feelings of

ownership over a property that, according to the law, she would never be able to own, is deeply original. The emancipatory potential of the portrayal of this kind of relationship towards property is fully explored in her next novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, through its heroine, Elizabeth.

4.3 The hope of the future

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen presents a significantly transformed conception of the role the scene of the tour around the prospective husband's house can play in the novel. Elizabeth arrives at Pemberley after having received Darcy's letter, in which he explains his role in the breakup of the relationship between Jane and Bingley, as well as his affairs with Wickham. When Elizabeth receives the letter she rushes through the first reading: "[w]ith a strong prejudice against every thing he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes" (156). In this first reading, therefore, Elizabeth is not able to control her emotions enough to give herself the necessary time to read Darcy's explanation carefully and, in doing so, get to know his real character. By the end of it, she puts the letter "hastily away" (156), but soon afterwards takes it up for a second perusal. Only then does she give herself the time to do a close reading of it and considers Darcy's explanation for his actions. As Felicia Bonaparte affirms, "still in the grip of those flaws from which the novel takes its title, Elizabeth at first misreads it [the letter]. Only when she reads it again in a different frame of mind is she able to arrive at a closer estimation of the meaning of its words and the intention of its author" (141). This close reading allows Elizabeth to analyse carefully the contents of the letter and the indicators of Darcy's good character that it contains. The second reading, therefore, is invested with great importance, since "each of Elizabeth's two readings produces the picture in her mind of a very different man. It is for the sake of determining which of these two is really Darcy that she must interpret his words, because one she would marry and the one she would not. And on that choice rests her happiness" (Bonaparte 154). After the second reading, Elizabeth's feelings towards Darcy suffer a considerable change, after

she realises his justifications for his actions are reasonable: “How different did everything now appear” (158).

This same ability for close reading becomes essential upon Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley, where she reads the space and looks for any indications that it may give her of Darcy’s character. It is this careful observation of her surroundings that allows her to create an intimate relationship between herself and Pemberley. The same is true for the reader’s experience of the description of the estate in that chapter, the first of the third volume. In contrast to her two previous novels, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen devotes an entire chapter to the description of the heroine’s visit to the house of the prospective husband, demonstrating the development of her conception of the importance of this moment within the novel. Furthermore, *Pride and Prejudice* contains a more sophisticated conception about how novels can depict characters imagining a future that stretches beyond the boundaries of the novels themselves. The description of Elizabeth’s method of imagining a future is arguably especially sophisticated, but this is most certainly not an isolated occurrence in the novel. Indeed, *Pride and Prejudice* is populated with characters thinking or worrying about the future, or both. Austen represents her characters conceiving of potential futures from the very first page of the novel: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1). Having decided that these must be the intentions of the new occupant, Mr. Bingley, his soon-to-be neighbours begin to speculate on whom he will marry. Mrs. Bennet declares that “it is very likely that he *may* fall in love” (2, emphasis in the original) with one of her daughters, and so the reader is left wondering whether her wish will materialise. Mrs. Bennet’s concern for what will happen in the future extends throughout the entirety of the novel, and so does that of her daughters and neighbours. Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley, however, is the moment in the novel that is the most representative of how Austen shows her characters conceiving of potential futures for themselves. Austen’s innovation is to provide the reader with an image of Elizabeth’s future at Pemberley, but not by offering a description of her married life with Darcy told in the present or past tense. Instead, she does this through chapters that are looking into the future and providing indications of what the character’s life might be like beyond the timeline of the novel. The way in which Austen accomplishes this holds semblances as well as dissimilarities to how people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries imagine and write

about potential futures, particularly in ways that establish an intimate link with a particular space.

As I mentioned in the previous section, guidebooks and auction catalogues emboldened their readers to imagine themselves as the occupants and the owners of the space they were inhabiting. In a similar way, the drawings in Humphrey Repton's Red Books encouraged property owners to imagine themselves inhabiting a future time in which they will have access to a newly-altered estate. These morocco-bound books would have contained not just watercolour drawings but also extensive written instructions, and were "theoretical as well as practical, making observations on landscape aesthetics as well as the actual landscape on site" (Daniels 1). As Stephen Daniels emphasises, the watercolours did not just function as adornments:

They were meant to elucidate, rather than merely ornament, the proposals, and they did so by a device, a hinged overlay or slide that when removed would reveal the improvements. A smart sales technique, this exploited the dramatic way of viewing or depicting scenery promoted by William Gilpin, improving the dull scene you saw with the delightful one you envisaged. The actual changes proposed might be relatively minor – say removing a fence or trimming some trees – but the scenic transformations were often spectacular. (3-4)

In this device consisted much of the allure of Repton's Red Books, as it provided a visual aid for what the estate could potentially look like after some alterations. Yet, it was the Red Books' combination of this visual element with the written one that offered a truly complete idea of the potential future that could materialise through Repton's efforts. Indeed, through the written descriptions that accompanied his drawings, Repton encouraged his clients to visualise the kind of life that the newly-improved property would allow them to have. For example, in his illustration of the proposed alterations to a garden designed by Jeffry Wyatville, Repton depicts children playing with toys. His written description justifies his choice of alterations illustrated by the picture, by explaining that they were done with the goal of making the garden a place that enables the enjoyment of the "Comforts and Infancy of Youth" (Daniels 188). Other alterations were planned with the intention of providing comfort for "the infirmities of age" (188). According to Repton, his improvements would "[furnish] employment and amusement to its Noble possessors for many years to come" (188).

Repton also asserts that “[e]verything that can contribute to the enjoyment of its scenery, I know must also contribute to the enjoyment of the neighbouring Country in its Agriculture, its Mineralogy, its Civilisation, and the general happiness of all who dwell within the influence of this Cottage on the Banks of the Tamar” (189). Repton’s clients, therefore, were able to imagine themselves occupying and taking possession over a space that was not yet in existence, as well as inhabiting a time that was still in the future.

Austen’s description of Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley holds some similarities to Repton’s Red Books. Whereas in his Books Repton imagines a future for the inhabitants of the house and envisions how it would be suited to them, Austen also portrays Elizabeth looking into the future in order to imagine what life would be like for her at Pemberley. However, the way in which Austen accomplishes this in her novels is far more subtle. Repton’s written descriptions work as prolepses, in the sense that they represent a future development as if it has already been accomplished. Austen, on the other hand, portrays her characters imagining a future that, even if it comes true – as in the case of Catherine and Elizabeth – will always be beyond the novel’s narrative frame. Its subtlety lies in the way Austen represents the process through which her heroines mentally inhabit this prospective future without actually resorting to a prolepsis which describes this future as if it has already materialised.

In her visit to Pemberley Elizabeth finds herself in a more awkward situation than the other two heroines. She is visiting the house of a man from whom she has received an offer of marriage, which she rejected. When Mrs. Gardiner first suggests this visit, Austen writes that Elizabeth “blushed at the very idea” (184). The cause behind the blush here is, much like that of Marianne and Catherine’s embarrassment, an understanding of the sexual implications of the visit to the house of the prospective husband. The fear that Elizabeth feels when she considers the possibility of being caught by Darcy surveying his property and her urgency in avoiding this situation is expressed through free indirect speech, with expressions such as “run such a risk” and “with no little alarm” (184). Elizabeth considers the possibility of informing her aunt of the reason behind her distress, but stops herself from doing so, as propriety forbids a woman from revealing a rejected marriage offer. When informed that Darcy will not be in the house on the day of her visit, Elizabeth is relieved. Darcy’s absence puts her “at leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house” (184), despite her still putting considerable effort into hiding this interest from her aunt and uncle. Here, Elizabeth

is still attempting to hide her curiosity, but with less of a sense of urgency, as everyone's lack of knowledge of the nature of her relationship with Darcy means that she has no reason to believe that they are watching her reactions closely.

When Elizabeth sees Pemberley for the very first time, like Catherine upon visiting Henry's house, she remains silent in order to conceal her interest in the estate, an interest that propriety forbids her from expressing. Even though "her spirits were in a high flutter" and her mind "too full for conversation," Elizabeth still "saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view" (185). Here, Austen presents one of the many instances in which she describes Elizabeth's appraisal of the estate as all-encompassing, as extending through its entirety. This takes place after she and the Gardiners have "ascended" to "the top of a considerable eminence," from which she can see the house, which is also "standing well on rising ground" (185). It is from this position that Elizabeth admires the "natural beauty" of the estate and feels "that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (185). Austen's indication that Elizabeth's view of the estate is all-encompassing continues in the section of the chapter in which she surveys it from the inside of the house:

They followed her [the housekeeper] into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene – the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it – with delight. As they passed into other rooms these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of their proprietor; but Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings. (185-186)

Here, Austen describes Elizabeth as being able to view the entirety of the estate from the elevated position of the house, which is situated "at the top of a considerable eminence" (185). From there, she can gaze at "the whole scene," and at "Every disposition of the ground," which presents her survey as comprehensive and unifying.

Austen's choice of the expression "to enjoy its prospect" is an interesting one, as it represents a play on the double meaning of the word "prospect." Indeed, the *OED* defines "prospect" as "an extensive or commanding range of sight," "the act of looking forward or out," or of "seeing into a distance," but also as "a mental picture of something future or expected," "the thing anticipated" or quite simply an expectation. Therefore, Austen simultaneously portrays Elizabeth imagining a future for herself in which she inhabits Pemberley, and emphasising her ability to visualise the whole of the estate and, symbolically, of society.

This description is in accordance with the conception of society as a landscape analysed by John Barrell:

By the various traditions of political thought inherited from the seventeenth century, the unity of society was often understood as requiring to be produced out of, and in spite of, the conflict of the various particular interests within it, and in such a conception of politics, the different passions, the different goals, the different interests of men were perceived as evidence of the instability of human nature and thus a threat to a unified and stable society capable of enduring through time. (*Equal Wide Survey* 21-22)

Consequently, as Barrell states, government was "to be entrusted to those who could claim the public virtue of disinterestedness" (22). According to Barrell, the property-owning aristocratic gentleman would have been the one invested with such a task. Indeed, a man who owned property "was or could be assumed to have a concern for the permanence of the polity, and to be above the temptation to sacrifice that concern to the consideration of immediate, local, or private interests" (32). The actual cultivation of the land not being part of his profession, the propertied gentleman would have had "the leisure to devote himself to a consideration and comprehension of the public interest as well as his own – which could be defined ... as anyway identical" (33). Therefore, the gentleman would have been considered disinterested for two reasons, "his permanent stake in the stability of the nation, and his freedom from engaging in any specific profession, trade, or occupation which might occlude his view of society as a whole" (33). As Barrell argues, the desire to maintain a "unified and stable society" led to the development of a particular conception of social organisation, that "of society as landscape, as painting, or as landscape painting, in which the various

objects in the view, in which light and shade, may appear in one perspective to be in no relation or even to be in conflict with one another, but can, from the correct viewpoint, be seen in ‘just harmony and proportion’” (31). In order to be able to visualise the entirety of the landscape, therefore, one cannot be part of it, but must take up a position outside of it.

As Barrell indicates, this conception of society features in various poems by James Thomson. An illustrative example of this is his poem “Spring” from *The Seasons* (1730). In this poem, Thompson portrays George Lyttleton, his patron, taking up a position outside of the landscape, from which he is able to have an all-encompassing view of it. Lyttleton’s ability to be impartial is emphasised by Thomson through the use of the image of someone looking over a prospect from the top of a high eminence, expressive of the conception of society as a landscape:

Meantime you gain the Height, from whose fair Brow
The bursting Prospect spreads immense around;
And snatch’d o’er Hill and Dale, and Wood and Lawn,
And verdant Field, and darkening Heath between,
And Villages embosom’d soft in Tress,
And spiry Towns by surging Columns mark’d
Of household Smoak, your Eye excursive roams:
Wide-Stretching from the Hall ... (ll. 950-961)

The poet imagines Lyttleton undertaking this walk in the company of his lover, Lucinda: “Perhaps thy loved LUCINDA shares thy Walk” (ll. 936).” Yet, despite Thomson’s indication that both Lyttleton and Lucinda reach the piece of rising ground, it is his view that is described, not hers. This is reminiscent of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which Adam is shown the future of humanity by Angel Michael also from a high eminence, whereas Eve is put to sleep and not allowed to join them: “Ascend / This Hill: let *Eve* (for I have drencht her eyes)” (ll. 365-366). From such a position, Lyttleton observes the extent of his estate, as well as the land that surrounds it. The description of the landscape encompasses both the country (“Hill and Dale,” “Wood and Lawn,” “verdant Field,” “darkening Heath,” “Villages”) and the city (“spiry Towns”), thereby presenting it as a representation of society in general. The landscape is thus depicted as a combination of various distinctive elements that,

through Lyttleton's gaze, are shown to make up a harmonious whole. Much like Adam, Lyttleton can also be seen to be considering the future from that particular position in the landscape, with this moment thus being characterised by a connection between time and space.

As Barrell indicates, in the eighteenth century it was believed that it was the propertied aristocratic man who possessed the ability to conceptualise society in such terms, to be able to visualise the whole of it in "just harmony and proportion" (31). Having no profession and consequently no personal, selfish interests to defend, the gentleman would figuratively not be part of the landscape, but would be able to take up a position outside of it, which he would visualise in its entirety. And yet, the abilities that Barrell argues were assigned exclusively to the aristocratic male are attributed by Austen to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. Indeed, the episode at Pemberley places Elizabeth in a position that holds interesting similarities to that in which Thomson situates Lyttleton. Austen indicates that Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle "ascended" to "the top of a considerable eminence" (185), language which echoes that of Thomson. It is from this position that Elizabeth first admires the house and considers that "to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (185). Significantly, the house is also described as "standing well on rising ground" (185), which means that, while occupying the interior of the house, Elizabeth will also be standing on a piece of rising ground. From inside the house, Austen describes Elizabeth surveying the various elements of the landscape: she sees "the river," "the threes scattered on its banks," a reference to one of the most distinctive elements of Repton's landscape gardening, and "the winding of the valley" (186). Elizabeth is described as possessing an all-encompassing and unifying view of the landscape that allows her to take in "the whole scene," and "[e]very disposition of the ground" "as far as she could trace it" (186).

Austen's decision to portray Elizabeth taking up this elevated position from the interior of the house instead of the exterior is worth accounting for. Critics have presented different interpretations for the significance of this detail. Volz argues that Austen's representation of Elizabeth observing various perspectives of the estate from the windows of the house would be her way of indicating Elizabeth's "opening up to new outlooks on Mr. Darcy through the character of the place" (71). Galperin, on the other hand, considers this detail to be restrictive and argues that, "for all her imagined authority, Elizabeth is even more contained than before" (128):

Not only is she enclosed by the house and by domestic space (and ideology); her gaze, although seemingly unrestricted, remains restricted by the vantage of Pemberley's windows, which vouchsafe some sights and not others. The more that Elizabeth asserts her authority, or acts on the presupposition of being free here, the more she resigns that freedom in discovering a nature beyond her ken and the reach of her fantasies. The particular control of the landscape earlier masked by the naturalizing techniques of picturesque gardening, so much as to invite fantasies of possession, is exposed from the vantage of Pemberley's interior in all of its limitation. (128)

Galperin thus states that this moment in the narrative presents Elizabeth as being constrained by the space of the house, which makes it harder for her to maintain her "fantasy of ownership" (127). Yet, as I have argued, Elizabeth's gaze is not portrayed as "seemingly unrestricted," but as unbounded. Austen's decision to depict Elizabeth admiring the landscape from the inside of the building through its windows is, in fact, demonstrative of her knowledge of landscape appreciation. As Zoë Kinsley affirms:

Eighteenth-century notions of landscape appreciation did not necessarily require the observer to be positioned within the natural environment being looked at. The "man" of taste should understand how to gaze at landscape from within the country house, as well as from within the pleasure ground. Consequently the windows of estate houses were placed as carefully as garden vistas in order to give access to the best prospect possible, and their architects and owners were judged upon the degree in which those homes facilitated visual access to the external landscape. (100)

A window would thus work as a frame that not only "acts as a point of transition between interior and exterior experience, but also as a point of dissolution between those supposedly separate spheres. The frame is therefore a feature of home tour experience through which it is possible for travelers to achieve a connected, rather than fragmented, conceptualisation of place" (99). That this is Austen's intention is also made clear by the indication that, from the inside of the house, Elizabeth admires all of the "beauties to be seen" (186) that belong to both the interior and the exterior of Pemberley. Indeed, after surveying the exterior, Elizabeth's gaze shifts to the

interior, where she observes the decoration of the rooms and looks for signs of what it can tell her about Darcy's character. She finds things "neither gaudy nor uselessly fine," "with less splendor and more real elegance" than Rosings (186). By stating that the furniture is "suitable to the fortune of their proprietor" (186), Austen also presents Darcy's management as being adequate to his income and status.

More importantly, by using the expression "from every window there were beauties to be seen" (186), Austen places Elizabeth in a position in which, like Thomson's Lyttleton, she is able to survey the landscape in its entirety. This depiction is one of power and ownership, instead of containment. Austen's emphasis on Elizabeth's shifting perspectives is demonstrative not of her "revised perspectives" on Darcy (Volz 24), but of her ability to take up that position outside of the landscape, which allows her to survey it in its entirety. By standing in the interior of the house, looking out into the whole extent of the estate, Elizabeth is portrayed as inhabiting the space that, as mistress of Pemberley, she would be managing and, consequently, over which she would be exerting control. In light of the contemporary conception of society as landscape, which could only be perceived in its entirety by an aristocratic landed gentleman, Austen's decision to portray Elizabeth in this same position exterior to the landscape shows her making radical use of a common trope. According to this conception of society, the aristocrat's ownership of property would have meant that he had "a permanent stake in the stability of the nation" (33), which would have, consequently, guaranteed his disinterestedness and his concern for making decisions based on what was best for the whole of society. And yet, Elizabeth does not fit the requirement of either property ownership, gender or class. Indeed, she is propertyless, a woman, and part of the gentry, instead of the aristocracy. Despite this, Austen still attributes to her the same abilities for disinterestedness that was thought to belong exclusively to the aristocratic gentleman. It is true that Elizabeth's position in society is considerably precarious due to her lack of property and her gender. However, it is precisely this precariousness that interests Austen and which makes Elizabeth's development of any feelings of ownership towards Pemberley truly compelling. By portraying Elizabeth performing what Barrell has called an equal, wide survey of the landscape, Austen presents this ability to be detached from the landscape as something that is separate from both gender and class. While in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen had already represented Marianne taking up that position outside of the landscape and surveying it in its entirety, what she meant to emphasise in that moment in the

narrative was the mourning of possibility, instead of an expression of potentiality, as with Elizabeth. Whereas Marianne cannot see Coombe Magna from the top of the high eminence, from the same position Elizabeth's eye is "instantly caught by Pemberley House" (185), which represents her potential future as Darcy's wife. This future, as the visible presence of the house indicates, is still very much a possibility for Elizabeth.

What precisely Austen is trying to achieve with the episodes in which the heroines visit the houses of the prospective husbands, however, has been a cause for contention amongst literary critics. Roger Sale, for example, affirms that "It is a mistake to conclude that Elizabeth thinks it would be 'something' to be Pemberley's mistress as a matter of ownership; obviously what she is responding to is the estate as the expression of Darcy" (41). It is unclear precisely why Sale would consider that the two are mutually exclusive. Wenner agrees with Sale and adds that these visits to the houses of the prospective husbands are primarily about the heroines "recognising a landscape which provides safety and camouflage for them" (9):

The gaze upon the landscape means something quite different for a woman – author or heroine – than it does for a man. When an eighteenth-century male with a background in the gentry gazes on the landscape, he frames it in a way that objectifies it and indicates its potential for control. When a woman gazes, she is imagining where she fits inside the landscape and how she can position herself to be helped by it. (4)

Wenner grants the Austen heroines an entirely subordinate and passive position in these landscapes. Indeed, Wenner considers that women's propertyless legal status means that a heroine cannot possibly be depicted imagining herself exercising ownership over a landscape because the author herself, as a woman, cannot conceive of this either. Whereas in the visits to the prospective husband's house we can see an attempt on the heroine's part to imagine where they "[fit] inside the landscape," the idea that a woman does this so that she can evaluate how she can be "helped by it" ultimately presents her lack of legal rights to property as an insurmountable obstacle in her attempt at establishing feelings of ownership towards it. As such, according to Wenner, female authors can only conceive of a reality in which their female characters can find ways to "adapt" or "survive" (4) within a society that places limitations on

their relationships towards property, but ultimately not subvert them. This is in accordance with Mary Poovey's argument that the marriages at the end of Austen's novels "disguise the inescapable system of economic and political domination" (237) and Kaplan's that they "unequivocally endorse patriarchal ideology" and confine the heroines to subordination (204).

Yet, as an avid reader of poetry, Thomson's included, Austen would have been very familiar with the prospect trope, and must have been aware that by using it in reference to Elizabeth she was doing something truly emancipatory.²⁵ As Kinsley demonstrates, travel literature by women in Austen's period had already begun to question and revise the idea that only men had the ability to remain disinterested aesthetic subjects:

The notion of the disinterested aesthetic subject, as developed by Shaftesbury and Addison and perpetuated by numerous subsequent male aestheticians, relied upon a dichotomous formulation of perception and judgement which set the educated, wealthy, landowning gentleman of taste against the "vulgar," a category which included women, along with anyone of working-class or non-European status. (77)

Those who, like women, were considered "vulgar," were believed not to possess the ability to access "the most developed and significant forms of aesthetic pleasure because their identity denied them the ability to achieve the requisite emotional, intellectual, and material detachment from the landscape" (77). The same applies to the picturesque movement which, by being contingent on "a masculinist vision of detached and authoritative aesthetic contemplation," inevitably excluded women (79). This, however, did not prevent women from challenging "the concept of the elite, educated, disinterested male observer, not from a position external to, but rather one inside, aesthetic discourse" (104). As Kinsley demonstrates, travel narration "offered women the textual space to engage with, and also undermine, the dominant ideology" (77). Austen can be said to be doing something similar in her use of the prospect trope in her novels. Indeed, much like the women whose work Kinsley analyses, Austen also uses her novels to challenge the idea that women do not have the ability to place

²⁵ See Peter Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, which looks into Austen's references to Thomson's "Autumn" from *The Seasons* in *Persuasion*, p. 24-25.

themselves in that position outside of the landscape. In both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, she portrays her heroines not being “helped” by the landscape, as Wenner states (4), which would place them in a passive stance, but taking up that position as disinterested aesthetic and political subjects. As Newton argues, the ending of *Pride and Prejudice* with Elizabeth’s marriage to Darcy ultimately leaves us with an impression not of the precariousness and limitations of Elizabeth’s situation, as authors such as Galperin have argued, but of her power: “it is simply a tribute to Austen’s genius that what we take from *Pride and Prejudice* is not a sense of Elizabeth’s untimely decline but a tonic impression of her intelligence, her wit, and her power, and it is an even greater tribute that we do believe in her power, that we do not perceive it as a fantasy” (41). In the episode at Pemberley, therefore, Austen places Elizabeth not just in an active position, but in a position of power.

Indeed, Austen portrays Elizabeth’s feelings towards Pemberley as a legitimate and compelling kind of ownership. This is particularly emphasised when, whilst gazing at the whole extent of the estate from inside Pemberley House, Elizabeth imaginatively positions herself in the role of its mistress: “‘And of this place,’ thought she, ‘I might have been mistress! With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my uncle and aunt’” (186). Elizabeth is imagining the future which could have been her present had she accepted Darcy’s offer. In this moment, she is contemplating what she has lost but still hopes she may get in the future, as she is wondering if Darcy remains in love with her. Austen’s version of the prospect scene thus mixes different kinds of potentialities and temporalities. For Elizabeth, a future as mistress of Pemberley is both the path not taken and also the path that could be taken. This moment thus presents an interesting mix between present and future that we do not find anywhere else in Austen.

Moreover, the word “mistress” here refers to the role that Elizabeth could have if she marries Darcy, one which is of considerable influence and responsibility. The possessive “my own” is expressive of Elizabeth’s feelings of ownership towards the space of Darcy’s house, an ownership that is presented as perfectly valid, whilst being completely independent from the legal ownership of the estate. Through the use of the expression “I might have rejoiced in them as my own,” Austen thus places emphasis on the idea that affection is a valid basis for ownership. It is the form of the novel which allows Austen to give the reader access to Elizabeth’s thoughts, as well as Catherine’s

and Marianne's, through free indirect speech, thus expressing the mental process through which they imaginatively inhabit a potential future. For Austen's purpose, it is irrelevant that the law does not sanction the feelings of ownership that she attributes to the heroines of her first three novels. Through her representation of how her heroines conceive of themselves belonging and taking full possession over a space in the future, Austen does what the law fails to do: she legitimises female ownership of property.

Elizabeth finds herself in a peculiar position since she is visiting Pemberley as a tourist. Yet, as Austen emphasises throughout the chapter, there are significant differences between Elizabeth and a common tourist. It is true that, much like a tourist would have done, Elizabeth imagines herself as occupying the space of Darcy's house, but the difference lies in the fact that, for her, this is something attainable. Consequently, mentally placing herself in the position of mistress of Pemberley is not a fantasy in which she is indulging, but a way for her to imagine herself inhabiting a future that is very much in her reach, in order to decide whether it is in that life and that place where she wants to belong. Indeed, her receipt of a marriage proposal from the owner of the house means that, when she visits it, she does it with the awareness that it could have been – and it could still be – hers. As Susan Lamb indicates, a tourist would always have expected to return home after the visit (18), whereas Elizabeth is, in that moment, contemplating whether she would be happier exchanging Longbourn for Pemberley. Furthermore, it is not that tourists would not have established a link between the physical environment of the estate and the character of the owner, but this would not have possessed the same sexual tenor or level of emotional investment and significance that it has for Elizabeth. All of these aspects combined place Elizabeth in a very different situation from that of a common tourist at Pemberley. Austen also positions Elizabeth as a disinterested aesthetic subject, standing outside of the landscape as she contemplates Darcy's estate. In doing so, she presents her as someone who, in contrast to the great ladies and the surrogate managers mentioned in the first and second chapters of this thesis, has the ability to step outside of herself, to think of more than her own personal interests and ambitions, and to observe what is going on around her. These abilities, consequently, allow her to see society as a whole. Because Elizabeth is able to do this, she can also self-manage throughout her visit at Pemberley.

By occupying the space of the house during the visit, Elizabeth is able to perform a close reading of the space and look for signs of what it may be able to tell her about

Darcy's character. The indication that Elizabeth not only approves but feels "admiration" (186) for Darcy's taste is indicative of the similarity between her taste and his, which is a good omen for felicity in a potential marriage between the two. Through this process, Elizabeth becomes intimate with the space, to the point that she imaginatively experiences what it would be like to be mistress of Pemberley and be given the opportunity to exercise her already existing feelings of ownership towards it. It is because Elizabeth is so aware of how she is already imaginatively inhabiting this space and feeling like she belongs to it that she colours when asked by the housekeeper if she knows Darcy: "Elizabeth coloured, and said – 'A little'" (187). The fact that Elizabeth knows Darcy, which results in the housekeeper's respect for her increasing, also separates her to a certain extent from just any tourist. Another factor that contributes to her blush is her knowledge of something of a sexual tenor that no one else knows: that she could have accepted Darcy's offer and be welcomed to Pemberley in that moment as its mistress. Throughout the tour given by Mrs. Reynolds Elizabeth continues to self-manage and exert control over how her body expresses her feelings, such as when Austen writes that she "almost" stared at Mrs. Reynolds after she describes Darcy as having been "the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world" and as presently being the best master (188). In this tour, Elizabeth receives two pieces of knowledge about Darcy from Mrs. Reynolds, which increase her confidence in her belief that she could belong to Pemberley. First, Mrs. Reynolds informs the guests of refurbishments taking place in one of the rooms at Pemberley:

On reaching the spacious lobby above, they were shewn into a very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done to give pleasure to Miss Darcy, who had taken a liking to the room when last at Pemberley.

"He is certainly a good brother," said Elizabeth, as she walked towards one of the windows.

Mrs. Reynolds anticipated Miss Darcy's delight, when she should enter the room. "And this is always the way with him," she added. "Whatever can give his sister any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her." (189)

The indication that this room has been decorated according to Georgiana's taste is conveyed through its description as possessing "greater elegance and lightness" than the other rooms. For Vickery, this room "offers material testimony of Darcy's unexpectedly sweet nature and domestic solicitude" (*Behind Closed Doors* 84) and is also demonstrative of his "generosity and readiness to care for the women nearest to him" (85). Darcy's decision to order a refurbishment of the room that is in accordance with Georgiana's taste because she "had taken a liking to the room," symbolises the transfer of ownership over it to his sister. Darcy's eagerness to facilitate Georgiana's establishment of feelings of ownership towards Pemberley is an intimation that he will do at least as much towards his future wife. Mrs. Reynolds's affirmation that this is just one of the many examples of Darcy's attentiveness towards his sister presents him as a considerate man and offers a "strong implication [of] his potential kindness as a husband" (Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors* 85). With this detail, Austen indicates that no woman living at Pemberley, whether Darcy's sister or wife, will be reminded that she is not the lawful owner of the property and prevented from establishing feelings of belonging towards it.

Sandie Byrne has argued that Elizabeth, "married to a wealthy man of aristocratic connections, might have greater means but less control over their surroundings than other Austen characters who will have less affluent lifestyles" (52). However, Austen indicates that Darcy will facilitate his future wife's development of feelings of ownership towards Pemberley, contrasting his attentiveness with the lack of it in other male characters. In fact, in the short description of Elizabeth's arrival at the Collins's house, Austen places great emphasis on Mr. Collins's disinclination to facilitate his wife's development of feelings of ownership towards the parsonage by giving his speeches a repetitive quality. Through free indirect speech, Austen communicates Mr. Collins's almost obsessive repetition of possessive determiners: "he welcomed them a second time with ostentatious formality to *his* humble abode," (120) "To work in *his* garden was one of his most respectable pleasures," (120) "[b]ut of all the views which *his* garden ... could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings ... afforded by an opening of the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of *his* house" (121), "From *his* garden, Mr. Collins would have led them round *his* two meadows" (121, my emphasis). It is not accidental that Austen includes no less than six repetitions of this possessive determiner in just three paragraphs; they are an indicator that Mr. Collins constantly reminds his wife that the

house in which she lives is not legally hers. This is intentionally ironic since, in reality, the house is no more Mr. Collins's legal property than it is Charlotte's. As Austen would have known only too well from having a clergyman father, a man in that profession would not have owned the parsonage in which he lived, and the moment he gave up that profession would lose any right to live in it. Consequently, Charlotte's only way of developing feelings of ownership towards the house is to establish barriers between the space she occupies and the one occupied by her husband, and to physically distance herself from him. In order to achieve this, Charlotte encourages Mr. Collins to work in the garden, and chooses to sit in a different room to one that is better sized" and has a "pleasanter aspect" (129) in order to guarantee that she will be interrupted by her husband as little as possible: "but soon she saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment had they sat in one equally lively, and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement" (129). Hence, Austen indicates that a woman's ability to form feelings of ownership towards the house in which she lives can be facilitated or hindered by her husband, an important reason for choosing one's partner for life carefully.

Throughout her tour of Pemberley with Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth receives other kinds of information about Darcy that allow her to imagine herself living at Pemberley and belonging to it. After receiving a commendation of his character from Mrs. Reynolds and having had the opportunity to survey the estate, Elizabeth becomes aware of the level of Darcy's influence in other people's welfare and, consequently, begins to imagine how much good she could do herself as his wife:

The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! – how much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! – how much of good or evil must be done by him! (189)

As has been mentioned, Austen's exploration of the concept of belonging in her novels also includes the sense of fitting a certain role, and this is just what is at stake here. Duckworth has emphasised the ways in which Austen portrays Darcy as a man of good character through the description of his estate: "in *Pride and Prejudice* the aesthetic good

sense that is evident in the landscape of Pemberley ... permits the reader (and Elizabeth) to infer the fundamental worth of Darcy's social and ethical character" (38). According to Duckworth, however, Darcy is not only portrayed as a good man, but "follows in the line of such other dedicated characters as Darcy, Edmund Bertram, and Knightley, in whom no trait is more prominent than commitment to profession" (203). This is precisely what Austen emphasises in Elizabeth's thought: the level of responsibility that comes with being the owner of Pemberley and the fact that Darcy takes it seriously, contributing significantly to the welfare of other people. As Mrs. Reynolds affirms, she sees Darcy as possessing the same good qualities of his father and as being "just as affable to the poor" (188). Darcy is consequently shown to be an exemplary landlord, who assures the wellbeing of the people who are dependent on him. Austen thus presents another aspect of Elizabeth's feelings of belonging towards Pemberley: as the wife of Darcy and mistress of Pemberley, she will have a position in her own right, characterised by significant power and influence over other people's lives. In doing so, Austen indicates that as Darcy's wife Elizabeth will be granted a role that goes far beyond the practice of charity that, in *Coelebs*, More presented as the closest thing to a profession that a genteel woman could have.

That Austen portrays Elizabeth considering her role as mistress of Pemberley in these terms is made clear by the previously mentioned moment in the narrative in which she admires the whole extent of the estate from a position outside of the landscape. By depicting Elizabeth taking up this position, Austen attributes to her the same abilities for disinterestedness and sound morality that she is characterising Darcy as possessing. Galperin has argued that "[n]o one will dispute that ... Elizabeth is more precariously situated than Darcy. Where Darcy is 'master' of the place, literally and symbolically, Elizabeth at the height of her imagined authority is no better than a mistress" (129). The position of mistress of such a large estate, however, was of no trifling standing. Indeed, as the second chapter of this thesis has demonstrated, the role of mistress of a house included a wide range of responsibilities of both a practical and a moral nature, with the literature of the period recognising the power and influence that came with this position. When later in the narrative Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine that "the wife of Mr. Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to her situation" (271) she is including in these not just the romantic aspects, but also the more practical ones, such as a role that allows her to contribute to the welfare of other people.

Darcy's arrival during Elizabeth's tour of Pemberley demonstrates that it is not just mentally that Elizabeth is different from a common tourist. Indeed, Elizabeth may experience Darcy's presence through his possessions, but his arrival and subsequent invitation for her and her aunt and uncle to visit the house as his guests clearly distinguishes her from anyone else who visits Pemberley as a tourist. As Anderson indicates, tourists would not have had access to the family of the house: "Similarly, in a country house the family and their private rooms were set apart from the open spaces; the family's presence on a visitor's tour was often solely through their possessions" (202). When Darcy arrives at Pemberley during her visit there, they both blush due to awareness of how heavy with meaning her presence there is: "[t]heir eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush" (190). Subsequently, Elizabeth is so self-conscious of how her presence there can be interpreted by Darcy that, once again, she resorts to silence. She is described as feeling an "embarrassment impossible to overcome" and feeling "so astonished and confused" that she "scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face, and knew not what answer she returned to his civil enquiries after her family" (190). It is because Elizabeth is aware of the custom for an engaged woman to visit the house of the prospective husband that "the few minutes in which they continued together, were some of the most uncomfortable of her life" (190), since a woman's interest in the house would have been interpreted as interest in the man. Consequently, Elizabeth is described as blushing "again and again over the perverseness of the meeting," as she believes it is bound to give Darcy the impression that she has "purposely thrown herself in his way again!" (191) and is pursuing him for mercenary motives. Like Catherine with Henry during her visit to the parsonage, Elizabeth becomes more comfortable when Darcy speaks kindly to her, temporarily forgetting her embarrassment, but shortly afterwards becoming once again aware of the awkward situation in which she finds herself, resorting to silence once more: "With a glance, she saw, that he had lost none of his recent civility" and, to imitate his politeness, she began as they met to admire the beauty of the place; but she had not got beyond the words 'delightful,' and 'charming,' when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and she fancied that praise of Pemberley from her, might be mischievously construed. Her colour changed, and she said no more" (192). Due to Elizabeth's understanding that interest in Darcy's house can be construed as sexual interest in him, she decides to say as little as she can. Internally, however, she is making a great effort to self-manage, as Austen indicates: "Elizabeth, however, astonished, was

at least more prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and speak with calmness, if he really intended to meet them” (192). Austen thus portrays someone who, despite finding herself in an extremely awkward situation, has the ability to control herself.

Like the depiction of Catherine’s visit to Northanger Abbey, Austen also distinguishes Elizabeth from a common visitor by expressing her disinterest in the symbols of wealth Mrs. Reynolds points out through the tour: “Mrs. Reynolds could interest her on no other point. She related the subject of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the prices of the furniture, in vain” (188). Austen thus presents Elizabeth as overlooking precisely the elements of the tour that a tourist would have been interested in the most. For this reason, after Mrs. Reynolds mentions that Darcy will be “just as affable to the poor” as his father, it is “in vain” (188) that she details the cost of the furniture and the size of the rooms in which Elizabeth finds herself, as this is not interesting to her. The picture gallery also contains in its “many good paintings” substantial signs of wealth which equally fail to impress Elizabeth, who instead prefers to look at the drawings of her prospective sister-in-law: “she had willingly turned to look at some drawings of Miss Darcy’s in crayons, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible” (189). In fact, whenever Elizabeth is shown to pay attention to a sign of Darcy’s taste, she does it so that she may evaluate his character. This is why she disregards the family portraits, which represent the long-established high standing in society of Darcy’s family. Instead, what makes an impression on her is the decorations in the room that is meant for Georgiana, as they are an indication of Darcy’s kindness as a brother. After her first encounter with Darcy, Elizabeth even finds it difficult to survey the rest of the estate, instead becoming engrossed in wondering “what at that moment was passing in his mind; in what manner he thought of her, and whether, in defiance of everything, she was still dear to him” (191). Through these details in the representation of Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley, Austen thus indicates that, even though Elizabeth’s formation of an emotional attachment is intimately connected with his property, her motivations for wanting to become its mistress are not avaricious.

Consequently, she and her aunt and uncle pass by other signs of wealth that Elizabeth fails to notice at first: “They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; but it was some time before Elizabeth

was sensible of any of it" (191). Yet, this detail represents more than just a sign of wealth. Here, as in other points in the chapter, Austen emphasises the richness of the woods of Pemberley. Indeed, the second paragraph of the chapter describes "a beautiful wood, stretching over a wide extent" (184) and, once inside the house, Elizabeth looks out the window to see "the trees scattered" (186) on the banks of the river. After Elizabeth's encounter with Darcy, Austen describes their walk around the estate and once again places emphasis on its woods: "They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; whence, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream" (190). The trees can be seen as symbols of prosperity, making them, consequently, symbols of Darcy's wealth. Nevertheless, trees can also suggest fertility and, as Duckworth has argued, "organic growth and continuity" (54). Austen's description of Pemberley appears, therefore, to be in accordance with the idea of the estate as a living organism, as indicated by Arnold: "Conversely, the importance of a country estate tends to be defined by revenue, not its capital value or its acres, perhaps because it is regarded as a living organism, rather than a passive asset" (142). Volz also argues that Austen's decision to portray Elizabeth surveying the estate from various perspectives by looking out the windows of the house makes "the place [appear] more living than stationary" (72). Hence, in her description of Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, Austen places emphasis on the trees which are spread out through its grounds to convey an idea of continuity. As she portrays Elizabeth imagining a future for herself at Pemberley, Austen indicates that the estate has a prosperous future ahead of it and that she will be part of it.

During her visit to Pemberley, the estate replaces Longbourn as the place in which Elizabeth feels that she belongs. Darcy's second offer is followed by their courtship period in which, despite still living at Longbourn, Elizabeth is imaginatively inhabiting that future time in which she will be living at Pemberley:

Mrs. Philips's vulgarity was another, and, perhaps, a greater tax on his forbearance; and though Mrs. Philips, as well as her sister, stood in too much awe of him to speak with the familiarity which Bingley's good-humour encouraged, yet, whenever she did speak, she must be vulgar. Nor was her respect for him, though it made her more quiet, at all likely to make her more

elegant. Elizabeth did all she could to shield him from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep him to herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and she looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley. (294)

Emily Rohrbach has argued that in certain moments in *Persuasion* Anne is portrayed imagining the present as past in order to make herself feel better: “A speculative future orientation offers an alloy to her conscious anguish coming from immediate sensations. In otherwise distressing circumstances, there is some consolation available in thinking that the present will become the past. Put another way, the grammar of future anterior thought affords Anne a multiplicity of presents” (59). The same is applicable to Elizabeth, who in this excerpt is described as imagining herself living at Pemberley, taking pleasure from the idea that she will be able to leave Longbourn and certain members of her family behind.²⁶ Her state of mind in the present, which is “ever anxious,” is contrasted with the “hope” and “delight” that, as Austen indicates, will characterise her future. The expression “hope of the future” is here expressive of the way in which Austen’s exploration of the concept of belonging includes the idea of longing. It also denotes Elizabeth’s development of an emotional attachment towards a potential future with Darcy. Here, much like Catherine and Marianne, Elizabeth is shown to be distancing herself from Longbourn and imagining herself at Pemberley, which has replaced her parents’ house as the place where she feels she belongs. Instead of focusing on the present, Elizabeth is “looking forward with delight” to that happier future in which she will be living at Pemberley. This is in contrast to the episodes analysed in chapter 3 where she is portrayed forming feelings of rootedness towards the place she is currently inhabiting.

²⁶ Elizabeth’s “uncomfortable feelings” resulting from her mother’s interactions with Darcy can be seen, as Paula Byrne affirms, to “reveal not simply a refined sensibility on the model of Burney’s heroines but a deeper, more complex sense of the requirements of social conduct” (*The Genius* 155).

Poovey has argued that romantic love in Austen “seems to promise to women in particular an emotional intensity that, ideally, compensates for all the practical opportunities they are denied” (237). Yet, at the end of Austen’s novels the heroines have gained, rather than lost, influence and opportunities. Indeed, the expression “the hope of the future” accurately describes the imaginative process through which Elizabeth, ever since her visit to Pemberley, has been mentally inhabiting the space of the new home. This excerpt also makes it clear that Elizabeth’s sense of belonging to Pemberley includes the idea of being part of Darcy’s family, something Austen indicates from the moment she portrays her surveying Georgiana’s drawings with more interest than any other works of art at the estate. *Pride and Prejudice* and Elizabeth are thus representative of the development of Austen’s exploration of the concept of belonging in her novels. By presenting the longing for property ownership over houses that are not legally theirs in three propertyless, genteel women as not just perfectly valid but compelling and powerful, Austen achieves something that is undeniably emancipatory: she unreservedly legitimises female ownership.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the central role of non-portable property in Austen's novels and the complex gendered relationships that her female protagonists establish towards it. While objects feature in interesting ways in Austen's novels, it is clear that she understood that they simply could not replace the level of security, as well as the potential for the conceptualisation of one's identity and sense of purpose obtainable through non-portable property. Fascinating a topic as portable property in literature is, it is problematic that recent criticism on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels has overwhelmingly associated women with only this type of property. Plausible as it may be to argue that the limitations imposed by the law would have made it easier for a woman to consider herself the owner of an object than that of a house or an estate, this viewpoint does not capture the complexity and range of human experience. I have addressed this gap in the criticism by analysing the gendered relationships that women establish towards the spaces in which they live in Austen's novels. As I have argued, for Austen ownership is primarily an affective relationship between a person and a space, which means that any limitations imposed by the law can potentially be counteracted. With this in mind, she shows her female characters resisting dispossession and displacement in a way that is distinctly emancipatory, as it allows them to circumvent any legal constraints that threaten to oppress them.

Through her portrayal of various forms of belonging, Austen thus presents affective belonging and ownership as substantial and meaningful in ways that preempt, but do not require legal legitimisation. In doing so, she puts forward a more flexible concept of ownership that accommodates feelings and emotions. To say this is not to argue that Austen overlooked the importance of legal ownership in her novels. Austen certainly comprehends the desirability of legal ownership and depicts in detail the feelings of displacement her characters experience when they are faced with the dispossession of their homes, or the threat of it, as the law prevents them from ever legally owning them. However, as I have demonstrated, Austen is at her most radical and original not when she vividly portrays the feelings of displacement of her female characters but when she depicts them overcoming this displacement. Throughout this thesis, I have suggested alternative interpretations for those poignant moments in the novels in which the heroines either lose their homes or are confronted with the

inevitability of this loss. As I have argued, there is scope for reading these moments in the novels as depictions of resistance instead of loss and displacement.

It is undeniable that Austen is honest about the real consequences prejudices against female ownership of property have for genteel women, since they are the driving force behind the plots of her novels. What distinguishes her from many contemporary authors and also nineteenth-century authors that would succeed her is the optimistic tone of her novels. Ruth Perry has argued that fictional representation can “imagine perfection rather than loss” (7) and, indeed, Austen’s novels are illustrative of the ability fiction possesses to imagine not exactly perfection, but a more favourable context than that in which it is produced. Painfully aware as she was of the real effects the constraints imposed on women by the law could have on their lives, Austen instead emphasises the ways in which women can thrive within these circumstances. With this in mind, she portrays her heroines experiencing a reality that is far more auspicious than the one that characterised the lives of many of her female contemporaries and even her own. Challenging as the circumstances of almost all of her female heroines are, they nevertheless fail to prevent them from finding happiness and security. By expanding the concept of ownership, Austen thus anticipates the legitimisation of female ownership brought along by the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882.

The first Married Women’s Property Act would be published in 1870, but the second Act in 1882 would be necessary to fix loopholes that still allowed husbands to confiscate property from their wives. Due to its recognition of married women’s rights over their property, this second Act can be regarded as the watershed moment that legitimised the powerful feelings of ownership that many women had been establishing towards property for a long time. Despite this, however, women continued to be disadvantaged by the laws of primogeniture. Indeed, it would not be until the 1925 Administration of Estates Act that the British Parliament would abolish the enforcement of primogeniture in the case of absence of a valid will. To this day hereditary peerages also pass exclusively to and through men. Yet, women are not the only ones handicapped by the laws of primogeniture either in Austen’s period or in our own, as such laws also deprive younger brothers of a share of the family property. While these aspects of British law are reflective of the sexism that continues to prevail in our society and disadvantage women, they pertain exclusively to the most privileged sector of the population. Throughout this thesis, I have focused on the genteel classes,

as these are the ones on which Austen centres her novels. It is important to keep in mind, however, that lack of access to legal ownership of property in any historical period will disproportionately affect people of the lower social classes.

In this thesis, I have reconceptualised ownership. Our current conception of it as something that is always dependent on a legal right is unhelpful to an understanding of the depiction of women's relationships to property put forward by Austen and other authors. Such a conception also does not take into consideration the complex and varied ways in which people more generally experience these relationships. Although, due to the necessarily limited scope of this thesis, I have focused on the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, my reconceptualisation of ownership has implications for any historical period, including our own. In fact, today a great part of the English population does not own any property, with the current generation being widely named "Generation Rent" as a result of its lack of both inclination and opportunities for legally owning property. As with Austen's period, inequality is rife not just across genders but also across classes, with a high percentage of property and land in the UK still being owned by a very small part of its population. For instance, both the royal family and the Crown Estate own some of the largest and most luxurious properties in the country. 36,000 people own 50% of the rural land in England and Wales, whereas only 432 landlords own the same percentage of land in Scotland.²⁷

As these numbers evidence, we run the risk of undervaluing the experiences of an incredibly large part of the population if we do not expand our concept of ownership to accommodate a form of belonging in the world that is not dependent on a legal right over the spaces in which one lives. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that such a form of ownership, though powerful and enabling, does not hold more risks than an ownership that is legally sanctioned. Indeed, to describe other forms of ownership as valid and compelling is not to negate the importance of legal ones, but simply to shed light on alternatives to it that characterise – and have always characterised – the experience of a great number of people. It does, however, pose challenges to the preservation of differences between ownership based on a legal right and ownership based on feelings and emotions. By considering other forms of

²⁷ See "Who Really Owns Britain?" *Country Life*, 2010, <http://www.countrylife.co.uk/articles/who-really-owns-britain-20219>.

ownership to be equally valid and legitimate, we may be prone to altering the ways in which we think of legal ownership. There is not a simple answer to these problems, as one's attitude towards the space where one lives is inevitably complex, deeply personal and dependent on various factors.

Through my analysis of Austen's portrayal of gendered relationships towards property, I have considered the ways in which fiction can shed light on the difference between the dictates of the law and the heterogeneity of lived experience. Recent socio-historical studies on women and property have reflected on this difference and uncovered the experiences of many women who established relationships of ownership towards property that were not legitimised by the law. Some Austen scholars, however, have tended to make a reductive use of social history by seeing in Austen's novels fictionalisations of the oppression experienced by women in her period, an oppression that they have considered she reinforces rather than circumvents through her narratives. Recently, Sandie Byrne has argued that Austen portrays her female characters as being unconcerned with property management and ignorant of virtually anything related to it because the law prevents them from becoming legal owners of property: "A key part of the characterisation of Mary Musgrave is that ... her husband cannot get her to appreciate the value of freehold land. Why should she? ... Few of the women will have anything to do with the management of farm or estate, and none of them will own either house or land (237-238). Similarly, Wenner considers that, due to women's propertyless legal status, a heroine cannot possibly be depicted imagining herself exercising ownership over a landscape because Austen herself, as woman, cannot conceive of this either. For Wenner, a heroine's lack of legal status as owner of a property is an insurmountable obstacle in her attempt at establishing feelings of ownership towards it. Female authors, therefore, are only able to envisage a reality in which their female characters can find ways to "adapt" or "survive" within a landscape: "When an eighteenth-century male with a background in the gentry gazes on the landscape, he frames it in a way that objectifies it and indicates its potential for control. When a woman gazes, she is imagining where she fits inside the landscape and how she can position herself to be helped by it" (4).²⁸ Such authors have consequently

²⁸ Other authors who have made a similarly reductive use of social history include Poovey and Kaplan. Poovey argues that the marriages at the end of Austen's novels "disguise the inescapable system of economic and political domination" (237), whereas Kaplan states that they "unequivocally endorse patriarchal ideology" and confine the heroines to subordination (204). Kaplan also considers that women in Austen's period obeyed the dictates of conduct

overlooked how Austen's narratives fictionalise the everyday actions through which people quietly subvert the constraints of power. Indeed, this thesis has worked against historicist approaches that see power as something so pervasive that they call into question an individual's agency. My reading of Austen's fiction has shown how conditions of oppression can generate socially productive responses that circumvent the logic and aims of this same oppression. In Austen's novels, property laws that attempt to prevent women from accessing the freedom and security that comes with the legal ownership of property in fact function as the stimulus behind innovative gendered forms of belonging. These alternative forms of belonging emerge not despite the constraints and inequalities prevalent in English society, but because of them.

The quiet acts of resistance undertaken by Austen's female characters are, as this thesis has demonstrated, intimately connected to feelings and emotions, making further engagement with the burgeoning work on the history of emotions something from which scholarly work on Austen could greatly benefit. Indeed, the study of emotions may bring us closer to understanding how political change takes place. Susan J. Matt argues that the history of emotions "forces all historians to alter many of their traditional conceptions of the past" (121): "while scholars have long known about the structural inequalities built into colonial, Victorian and 20th-century marriages, they have known little about how it felt to exist in such relationships" (122). As Matt explains, research on the emotions can allow us to understand what it felt like to experience certain kinds of relationships. How, for instance, did it feel for women to establish feelings of ownership and belonging towards a space they were aware would never legally be theirs? How did women negotiate the unequal position in which they found themselves? How do people generally negotiate such positions? What role can fiction play in the negotiation of social reality? These are all questions that an engagement with the study of the emotions can help us answer.

Austen would die in Winchester in 1817, leaving behind an incomplete novel, *Sanditon*, which she was unable to finish due to the illness that would eventually claim her life. Her first three novels show her portraying her heroines developing a sense of belonging that is intimately connected with the house of a prospective husband. And

books which, according to her, contributed to the subordination of women and exhorted them to "not gratify themselves in any way" (41). According to Kaplan, "[g]enteel domesticity assigned to women a devalued role and only that role. As it was practiced by Austen's community, domesticity effectively inhibited other ways of life" (41).

yet, these three novels are incredibly different: while both *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* are centred around a heroine who establishes feelings of belonging towards the house of a prospective husband, the novel concluding with her move to that same house, the latter makes a far more radical point about gender and class. *Sense and Sensibility* also distinguishes itself from these two novels through its poignant depiction of loss. *Mansfield Park*, with the most precariously-positioned heroine of all of Austen's novels, concludes with an extremely ambiguous ending, in which the conditions that have led to the moral disintegration of the family that lives at the estate are still very much in place. The novel ends with the heroine living within the estate in which she feels she belongs, but this is far from the triumphant resolution with which Austen concludes the previous three novels. *Emma* is also distinct from all the other novels in the sense that it is the only one centred around a privileged heroine. Despite their dissimilarities, all of these novels feature a heroine whose form of belonging in the world is deeply connected to a particular space. In contrast to this, in *Persuasion*, Austen's last complete novel, she puts forward a form of belonging that is centred around a group of people, not a space, a point in need of further exploration. Had Austen ever finished *Sanditon*, we may have been able to tell whether she was moving away from a depiction of belonging primarily related to property. As it is, however, we will never know.

In the portrayal of her heroines' feelings of ownership towards houses they would never own, Austen made strikingly radical points about gender and property ownership that were emancipatory both for her female characters and her female readers. By expanding the concept of ownership in her novels, she liberated her characters from the constraints imposed by the law. In doing so, she offered her readers an unapologetically hopeful viewpoint on the various forms of belonging available to all genteel women, however precariously situated in life. Her choice to legitimise her female characters' feelings of ownership towards their homes anticipated the law by several decades. There is no better example of her accomplishment than her depiction of Elizabeth Bennet's visit to Pemberley. After being led by Mrs. Reynolds into the dining-parlour of Pemberley house, Elizabeth stands by the window to "enjoy its prospect" (185). From this position she surveys the entirety of the estate and imaginatively positions herself in the role of mistress of the estate: "'And of this place,' thought she, 'I might have been mistress!'" (186). As she contemplates the rest of the estate, she looks into the future and imagines a life for herself at Pemberley. Through

the word “mistress,” Austen indicates that the role Elizabeth will take up as Darcy’s wife will be one of great influence and responsibility. The possessive “my own” marks Austen’s legitimisation of Elizabeth’s wish to consider the estate as her own. Looking out into the grounds of Pemberley, Elizabeth plans a future for herself that is in no way dependent on the dictates of the law. Writing by the drawing-room window of what is now known as Chawton Cottage at the beginning of the nineteenth century, her creator was also looking into the future.

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